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Cast Index

Listed alphabetically are the names of actors and actresses in New York shows opening during the year 1942. The number opposite the name indicates the page on which each is found in CRITICS' THEATRE REVIEWS. We regret that we can not include the various cast changes but can only give the opening night casts as published in the New York newspapers.

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Critics'

THEATRE REVIEWS

"You'll See Stars"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
January 2, 1943

Play Depicts Stage Life

By BURTON RASCOE

YOU'LL SEE STARS, described as a "musical comedy biography of Gus Edwards," was more than an hour late opening at Maxine Elliott's Theater on New Year's Eve, and when the curtain finally did go up the audience very soon wished it hadn't.

The thing was pitiful. Anyone with any heart in him could not help feeling that it was a little short of criminal to build up the hopes of the 20-odd kids in the cast that their careers were to be made by this chance to appear on Broadway and turn them out on the stage, badly trained and directed in a hastily thrown-together mess. Unless their skins are thick, the kids will bear the marks of that New Year's Eve on their souls for years.

The movie success of Yankee Doodle Dandy apparently prompted the Messrs. Kramer and Timberg to get into production as fast as possible, a something with song and dance about Gus Edwards. Even grandfathers sang Edwards' School Days and his songs have been popular for three generations. Moreover, much has been made of the fact that such Broadway stars as Eddie Cantor, George Jessel, Ray Bolger, the Four Marx Brothers, Georgie Price and Lola Lane first got their start in Gus Edwards' Postal Telegraph Boys and other song and dance acts that played the subway circuit 30 years ago. The Messrs. Kramer and Timberg must have figured that if Hollywood should be in the market for something about Gus Edwards, it might be well to establish a claim to proprietary rights with a Broadway quickie.

The result was a ghastly debacle, during which about half the audience walked out before the show was half over. Not only were the book and lyrics an imposition on the audience, but among the kids assembled for the cast not more than four displayed any talent whatever. One girl, Honey Murray, shone in her ragtail-bobtail surroundings like a many-faceted diamond among tarnished costume jewelry from a dime store. She is not particularly good-looking, but she is a natural-born dancer; she has the spark. Already her work is effortless-seeming, soothing, her whole body carrying the rhythms naturally. With eight hours' work a day for two years, she'll be somebody.

In contrast with her is a young man who has already worked hard. He has mastered some tricky and difficult steps. His name is Eric Victor. He has everything Ray Bolger has—except one thing: he is not a dancer; he is simply someone who, by hard work, has learned showy steps but hasn't learned how to dance. Maybe it will all come to him some day. I hope so. Such application should be rewarded. . . . In voice and gesture, Jackie Green and Lou Dahlman impersonated Eddie Cantor and Groucho Marx, respectively, very well indeed; but they can't go through life impersonating Eddie Cantor and Groucho Marx. . . . The show opened cold and gathered icicles.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
January 2, 1943

"You'll See Stars" Gets a Poor Start On New Year's Eve

By BURNS MANTLE

IT IS unfortunate that Herman Timberg's loyalty to his counsellor and friend, Gus Edwards, should have prompted him to write what he calls a "musical comedy biography" of Mr. Edwards, entitled "You'll See Stars."

It is doubly unfortunate that Dave Kramer, another Edwards enthusiast, should have raised the money to produce it. The net result, as exhibited at the Maxine Elliott theatre New Year's eve, was to expose a modestly talented group of young people to an unsympathetic audience and to blast, temporarily, their present hope of obtaining stage employment.

On the other hand it may have been a good thing for several of the youngsters. This experience may serve to humble them and either divert them to useful occupations, or send them back to their training school.

It may also serve to discourage misguided parents, thus preventing them from subscribing further funds to unscrupulous dramatic schools for the schooling of their ambitious but unpromising offspring.

"You'll See Stars" offered a series of back stage scenes during which a group of potential chorus material gave imitations of early Gus Edwards candidates for later stage prominence.

The imitations, all quite terrible, included those of Eddie Cantor, George Jessel, Georgie Price, Ray Bolger, Hildegarde, the four Marxes, the Cuddles who became Lila Lee and Mr. Timberg himself.

It may be that some of these imitators will eventually achieve some sort of stage distinction, but their wishes and personal convictions in the matter cannot reasonably be accented as any sort of guarantee.

It would be as hard to judge them as it would be to tell from the tail wigglings of tadpoles how far they may later jump when they become frogs.

It is no more than fair to the Kramer candidates, however, to confess that I left them at the end of the first intermission. I could already see stars, but they were not on the stage.

My New Year's gift to them is the satisfying privilege of writing me, on the occasion of their first stage success, one or more of those "You poor dope" letters which frequently enliven a theatre reporter's professional life.

NEW YORK TIMES
January 1, 1943

Farewell, '42

By LEWIS NICHOLS

THE theatre had its hangover last night, and it was a corker. For while the rest of the world stood happily blowing horns in near-by Times Square, the faithful gathered at Maxine Elliott's to mourn out the old year with a musical biography of Gus Edwards called "You'll See Stars." To say that it was bad is to underestimate the theatre in the final day of the year, for the ineptness of the book, direction and most of the people involved drove half the audience into the night at the intermission and left the rest in a state of profound melancholy. They apparently had nowhere else to go, and so they sat and saw further inpersonations of Eddie Cantor, George Jessel, the Marx Brothers and all the others who were brought to fame by Mr. Edwards. He, himself, was good at this sort of thing; the Elliott's children should have followed the model.

Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

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Critics' THEATRE REVIEWS

"You'll See Stars"

NEW YORK SUN
January 2, 1943

'You'll See Stars,' a Catastrophe, Opens at Maxine Elliott's Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

DURING the last few hours of 1942, a dreadful thing happened at Maxine Elliott's Theater. One Dave Kramer produced a musical called "You'll See Stars." This probably was done deliberately, although there were indications at the last moment that Mr. Kramer was trying to argue himself out of it. He failed; the curtain finally went up at 9:17, less than three hours before the dawn of a new year.

It is improbable that the new year, or any year in the future, will see anything in the theater quite so unnerving as "You'll See Stars," which is intended as a biography of Gus Edwards, the vaudeville man. It seems from Herman Timberg's book that Mr. Edwards introduced all entertainers now favorably known to man, from Cantor to Winchell, and including George Jessel, Ray Bolger, Hildegarde and all the Marx Brothers. Mr. Timberg's book required, therefore, that all these people be impersonated.

Much of the resulting confusion has already passed from my mind. It may be weeks, however, before I shall be free from the haunting vision of Lou Dahlman playing Groucho Marx—playing Mr. Marx bent double and with an inconceivable ferocity and no doubt as badly as any one has ever played anything. The others in the cast, although seldom bent double, pressed hard on Mr. Dahlman's heels. Other aspects of "You'll See Stars" were equally abashing.

I cannot report what time the final curtain fell. But it is possible that some members of the audience, poor trapped things, were at the Maxine Elliott well into 1943. They, at any rate, now know the worst.

'YOU'LL SEE STARS'

A musical comedy in two acts; book and lyrics by Herman Timberg; music by Leo Edwards; dances by Eric Victor; presented at Maxine Elliott's Theater on December 31, 1942, by Dave Kramer. Among those in the cast are Alan Ray, Phyllis Baker, Buddy Swan, Jackie Green, Jackie Michaels, Joan Barrie, Norma Shea, Renee Rochelle, Lou Dahlman, Irving Freeman, Jack Matis, Arnold Stang and Mr. Victor.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
January 1, 1943

A Sorry Tribute

By HOWARD BARNES

THE theatrical activity of 1942 wound up with a dull thud last night at Maxine Elliott's Theater. "You'll See Stars," which Dave Kramer saw fit to inflict on a New Year's Eve audience plunges right down to the lowest depths of dramatic ineptitude. Its alleged musical biography of Gus Edwards is a farrago of song and dance nonsense. Except for a few time-honored tunes, it has nothing of even passing interest in the field of entertainment. Since the performers are generally as fumbling as the material, it is just as well that the show belongs to a year which is being ripped off the calendars.

* * *

There was some question, after the clock had struck nine last evening, whether a production would be presented on Thirty-ninth Street. When the curtain rose and "You'll See Stars" sprawled across the stage, there was some question of why the curtain had ever gone up. For this stuttering attempt to celebrate the career of a vaudeville maestro, who was associated with promising players at one time or another, does no credit to him or to the theater. Even in an amateur production, it would prove extremely trying.

* * *

Kramer and Herman Timberg, who foisted off the book and lyrics of the offering, were Gus Edwards boys themselves, so they were probably on the level in penetrating "You'll See Stars." All they overlooked was that little matter of bemusing an audience, even briefly. Even when the members of the cast attempt to impersonate such Edwards's alumni as Eddie Cantor, George Jessel or the Marx Brothers, there is no faint spark of gaiety in the proceedings.

* * *

The performers match their material perfectly. In other words, they are genuinely embarrassing. Jackie Green and Jackie Michaels try very unsuccessfully to take off Cantor and Jessel; Lou Dahlman looks as though he were cutting antics in the parlor in his impersonation of Groucho Marx and their several assistants are uniformly terrible. At least, "You'll See Stars" is all of a piece. No matter how you slice it, it is singularly unappetizing.

NEW YORK POST
January 2, 1943

"You'll See Stars" No Tribute to Gus Edwards, At Maxine Elliott's

By WILELLA WALDORF

IT IS conceivable that the career of Gus Edwards, the "Star Maker," might be turned into a nostalgic musical comedy of the good old days when vaudeville was vaudeville. The idea has occurred to Dave Kramer, a two-a-day headliner who started as one of Edwards' "Postal Telegraph Boys." With the aid of Herman Timberg, another alumnus of the Gus Edwards Academy, and Leo Edwards, Gus's brother, Mr. Kramer presented "You'll See Stars" at Maxine Elliott's Theatre on New Year's Eve and proved conclusively that something more than an idea is necessary to launch a Broadway musical show.

Gus Edwards has had a busy and colorful life as a showman, song writer and talent discoverer. Starting as a boy singer of popular ditties in a Brooklyn saloon, he worked his way into Tin Pan Alley as a composer and began to organize vaudeville turns full of smart kids getting their start in show business.

He traveled all over the country signing up precocious youngsters, wrote songs for them, taught them how to act and dispatched vaudeville units far and wide, introducing Eddie Cantor, George Jessel, the Marx Brothers, Walter Winchell, Georgie Price, Lila Lee (originally known as "Cuddles"), Helen Menken, Mae Murray and even Earl Carroll to ecstatic audiences. All of these celebrities were, of course, mere beginners then, and when other managers recognized the talents nurtured by Mr. Edwards, the Star Maker sent his proteges on to Broadway with his blessing.

Hildegarde, the Lane Sisters, Ray Bolger and Mitzi Mayfair are also included in the long list of Edwards' "discoveries" of somewhat more recent vintage, but the palmy days of his career centered around the presentation of such old-time extravaganzas as the "Kid Kabaret," in which both Cantor and Jessel took part. As the boys grew older, they still traveled about the country in knickerbockers on orders from Mr. Edwards, who saw no reason for paying more than half-fare for the troupe.

Amateurish Goings-on

With such a background to work on, and some of the old popular tunes to tinker with, Mr. Kramer and his associates might have made something at least mildly diverting out of "You'll See Stars." But all they have done is to stage a shockingly inept hodge-podge of poorly written and wretchedly prepared sketches amateurishly performed by a troupe of unimpressive boys and girls supposed to be impersonating some of Gus Edwards' "discoveries" in the bloom of youth.

Most of them, we greatly fear, would be no better even equipped with good jokes, although now and then Jackie Green as Eddie Cantor did indicate that he might be funny under other auspices. By far the most distressing exhibition was put on by Lou Dahlman as Groucho Marx. Mr. Dahlman was the only member of the cast who managed to look like the celebrity he was impersonating, but he wouldn't let well enough alone. He tried to act like Groucho Marx as well.

It was a trifle astonishing, too, when "Ray Bolger" turned up wearing a beard, looking several years older than little Eddie Cantor.

As we recall this melancholy evening, the only episode that struck us verging upon the professional was some harp playing by George Lyons, who was supposed to be Harpo Marx in a red wig. Mr. Lyons did not try to act like a Marx Brother. He simply played the harp. It was a great relief.

"You'll See Stars" is hardly to be taken as a tribute to Gus Edwards, who is now living in retirement on the Coast. We have long had a suspicion that the Good Old Days may not have been quite as brilliant as they are painted by sentimental old-timers, but the shows Gus Edwards staged at Hammerstein's must have been a great deal better than the one Mr. Kramer is putting on at Maxine Elliott's.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
January 1, 1943

The Bhumba Was Very Rhythmatic

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

HAVING just made a New Year's resolution to be at all times kind and courteous during 1943, here I am face to face with *You'll See Stars*. It is permitted, perhaps, to say that at the Maxine Elliott, last night, they saw the old year out with small regard for the many dire things it had been through. It is even allowable, I think, to insist that some remarkably strange things went on at the Maxine Elliott. To begin at the beginning, the curtain, scheduled to ring up at 8:40, rang up at precisely 9:17.

About 9:18, matters started taking a downward turn. Around 9:23, they had dropped way below sea level. Around 9:31 began the descent into Avernus, still moving downhill, and picking up speed at a fearful rate. (New Year's resolutions don't apply to metaphors.) Around 10:36—but I was no longer around by 10:36. I clean missed out on *Swinging the Bhumba* and *Readin', Writin' and 'Rhythmatic*.

* * *

If you'd like to know more, *You'll See Stars* is a musical-comedy biography of Gus Edwards, the man who used to develop kid talent and who gave Eddie Cantor, Georgie Jessel, Walter Winchell, Groucho Marx, Hildegarde, Ray Bolger, and others their start. All the aforesaid are impersonated in *You'll See Stars*, and surely it is permitted to say that the impersonators are ever so slightly inferior to the originals. As for the dialogue, it is—quaint. The songs?—well, they're unusual. The acting?—let's call it different. The reviewer?—he just swallowed poison.

"The Doughgirls"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
December 31, 1942

The Doughgirls Opens at Lyceum

By BURTON RASCOE

THE DOUGHGIRLS, by Joseph Fields, which opened at the Lyceum last night also opened my innocent eyes to goings-on in Washington which I never suspected, but which appear to be common knowledge to those who have visited the capital in wartime in search of one of the various things one makes a trip to Washington for. Those who will like and those who will not like the play may be roughly divided, I think, into two classes—Republicans and Democrats.

If you are merely a Democrat you are likely to consider the whole thing in bad taste, but if you are an ardent New Deal Democrat you are likely to consider it downright subversive if not actually treasonable. One citizen of the New Deal persuasion last night gravely told me that the play should be suppressed in the interest of war morale. "The righter it is," he said, "the worse it is for the public to know about it. These are times when it is not in the public interest to be truthful. If the play were more exaggerated you could pass it off as just an entertainment. But, hell! it presents an actual situation."

* * *

A Republican Viewpoint

And here I was, thinking the thing was a farce-comedy, picturing a wholly imaginary mixup for the purpose of humorous entertainment. But an anti-Roosevelt Republican bore out the main point of my New Deal friend's contention. "If you think there is any exaggeration in this play," he said, "your head is full of balloon juice. The play is realistic, but on the subdued, sentimental and romantic side. You can't satirize what's going on down there. The truth is utterly beyond belief. Washington is one vast madhouse of chiselers, climbers, promoters, stuffed shirts, phonies, bureaucrats and others with, or trying to get, their feet in the public trough—and their women. And God, what women! The kept gals in this play are sweet, innocent and virginal in comparison with many of the harpies and chippies riding high in Washington."

I haven't visited Washington since I shook hands with Coolidge, so I wouldn't know by observation or experience. All I can report is that I found the play a mildly entertaining and fast-moving comedy hardly worth rowing about or shouting hosannas about, either.

The play opens with a couple about to vacate their suite at a hotel in Washington, not because they want to but because their short lease has expired. The man is trying to land a government contract with the rubber control chief, and, although he has registered himself and his female encumbrance as man and wife, he has done so in defiance of the law or the hotel rule or something which says you mustn't do such things.

Such are the housing conditions of Washington that, while the lady is still in her bath, two other couples (both also, as it develops, in illegal intimacy) barge in and discover the lady occupant is also an old drinking companion with whom they have both been thrown out of some of the best night clubs in New York.

* * *

Cast Plays With Spirit

The three couples settle down in the suite, which is later also successfully invaded by a brigadier general, an admiral and a Red Army Amazon, a famous sharpshooter who has been sent over here by Joe Stalin on a sort of lend-lease arrangement, and who doesn't like the food or accommodations at the Soviet Embassy, preferring to take the American use of the word "free" very literally.

Complications arise when the women are enlisted for war work and, in order to do so, must be fingerprinted and investigated by the FBI. All is straightened out satisfactorily in the end when one of the couples is invited to lunch at the White House, where the man concerned is to receive a medal for sinking a Jap airplane carrier. How he got his commission, reached the Solomon Islands, accomplished his feat and got back to Washington in four weeks is something for you to figure out, but to me that was not the most implausible of the doings enacted.

The whole cast played with spirit, highest honors, perhaps, going to the five women principals—Virginia Field, Arleen Whelan, Doris Nolan, Arlene Francis and Natalie Schafer and to Reed Brown, Jr., and Vinton Hayworth among the men. . . . The play is pretty sophisticated—if that is the right word now. I doubt if it is much of a contribution to the war effort, unless as a fumigator.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 31, 1942

Washington Wives

By HOWARD BARNES

WHERE satirical comedy is concerned, it is a good thing to have George S. Kaufman on hand. With "The Doughgirls," which opened at the Lyceum last night, he has taken a highly contrived lampoon and filled it with laughter. His staging of this Joseph Fields play is downright brilliant. Granting that the author has whipped together some amusing lines and antic situations about predatory females in present-day Washington, they benefit immeasurably by the Kaufman touch. Since an excellent company is in charge of the actual fooling, the newest of the shows is a beguiling entertainment.

* * *

The nation's capital is certainly a rich field for farce these days. Fields has considered the periphery of the human comedy now going on there. His chief characters are several comely young ladies who pose as the wives of rather important figures in the war effort. Packed into one hotel suite, they experience a series of comic tribulations before they get their various men. A Russian sniper called Natalia adds to the confusion and amusement and Army and Navy bigwigs are treated to a gentle burlesque dusting off.

* * *

The point is that the subject matter might easily have proved tasteless and repetitious. After the first act exposition, "The Doughgirls" resolves itself into a few variations on a familiar theme. Without the Kaufman ministrations, the production would have proved far more brittle and less funny than it does. As it is, the comedy is gay and good-natured, as well as being a trenchant commentary on Washington hurly-burly. The lines exploit every inflection of comedy that is inherent in them on the Lyceum stage. The situations form and dissolve in a fast-paced and persuasive continuity.

* * *

The agility of the director is matched by that of the players in the Max Gordon exhibit. Doris Nolan is fine as the good time girl of an aviation lieutenant, who has to get married to him in a terrific hurry in order to join him at a White House luncheon. Arleen Whelan is as dizzy as they come in the role of a desk colonel's mistress and Virginia Field is superbly caustic as a gal who passes as a rubber expert's wife until the real wife appears on the scene. Meanwhile Arlene Francis, as the Russian guerrilla who moves in on the daffy crowd, is excellent: Natalie Schafer is amusing as the real wife in the set-up and King Calder, Reed Brown, Jr., Vinton Hayworth and the other male members of the cast contribute properly boisterous portrayals. "The Doughgirls" is slight, but thanks to the Kaufman direction, it is good fun.

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"The Doughgirls"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
December 31, 1942

Broadway Finally Gets Some Laughs

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

THERE was some good noisy laughter at the Lyceum last night, which—considering what a mirthless Yuletide Broadway has been having—must clearly be set down as news. If *The Doughgirls* is nothing very special, or even entirely savory, at least it may be hailed as a laugh show in a season where nearly all the other laugh shows have been hooted into the alley. The finer shades of comedy are quite alien to its mood. Even the subtler forms of the double-entendre are superfluous to its aims. *The Doughgirls* is as broad and breezy as the most tired captain of industry could ask for. What with so many people weary these days, the show should certainly be around for a while.

Centered in three attractive baggages who come to war-time Washington in a state of semi-matrimony, *The Doughgirls* airs their struggles to make matrimony complete while spoofing the general bedlam of the capital itself. Mr. Fields' mise-en-scene is a hotel suite that should have swinging doors, so many and precipitous are its visitors. Besides their original swains (with whom they are usually in hot water), the ladies entertain any number of additional admirers—admirals and generals and the like—as well as an unexpected wife or two, gents who have not where to lay their heads, FBI men, lady judges, and a Russian lady sniper. This last—who conceivably could have been suggested by Mlle. Pavlichenko—Mr. Fields has touchingly named Chodorov.

• • •

A great deal happens before the heroines are turned into honest women—some of it funny, some of it forced, some of it repetitious, a good deal of it—including the various escapades of Miss Chodorov—in not exactly flawless taste. Mr. Fields has crammed the show with gags, a good many of which won't bear thinking about. But Mr. Kaufman has paced the show with fury, so that there is not much time for thought. Mr. Kaufman is pretty much the hero of the proceedings: without his speed and inventiveness, the show, in all likelihood, would have fallen pretty flat and tasted pretty sour. As it is, it is fun.

As the three migratory ladies, Virginia Field, Doris Nolan, and Arleen Whelan perform with gusto. Reed Brown, Jr., is the best—and the best-served—of the swains. Arlene Francis does fairly well as the sniper, and Natalie Schafer is amusingly Hepburnish as a snooty wife. William J. Kelly does all right for the Army, and Thomas F. Tracey rather better for the Navy. What seemed like hundreds of other performers go properly through their paces also.

'THE DOUGHGIRLS'

A comedy in three acts by Joseph Fields; staged by George S. Kaufman; setting by Frederick Fox; presented at the Lyceum Theater on December 30, 1942, by Max Gordon. The cast:

Edna	Virginia Field
Julian Cadman	King Calder
Mr. Jordan	Sydney Grant
Colonel Harry Hallstead	Reed Brown, Jr.
Bellboy	George Calvert
Maids	Mary Cooper and Mildred Haines
Vivian	Arleen Whelan
Another Bellboy	Jerome Thor
A Porter	Hugh Williamson
Another Porter	Kermit Kegley
Walter	Walter Beck
Nan	Doris Nolan
Brig.-General Slade	William J. Kelly
Tom Dillon	Vinton Hayworth
Judge Honoria Blake	Ethel Wilson
Natalia Chodorov	Arlene Francis
A Stranger	Harold Grau
Orderly	Joseph Olney
Warren Buckley	Edward H. Robins
Sylvia	Natalie Schafer
Chaplain Stevens	Reynolds Evans
Admiral Owens	Thomas F. Tracey
Timothy Walsh	James MacDonald
Stephen Forbes	Maurice Burke
Father Nicholai	Maxim Pantelieff

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
December 31, 1942

'Doughgirls' Opens At Lyceum Theatre

By JOHN ANDERSON

NEWS from the Lyceum Theatre is that 1942 exits smiling. Max Gordon has brought to town a comedy of wartime Washington called "The Doughgirls," by Joseph Fields, and the Grand Vizier of the Broadway funnybone, the eminent Mr. Kaufman himself, has given the play the comic benefit of his shot-in-the-arm direction. The result is some light hearted foolishness, gay, laughable and irreverent, which now and then succeeds in being downright hilarious. It's a pleasure.

This Mr. Fields, of course, is the co-author of such celebrated and solvent antics as "My Sister Eileen" and "Junior Miss." Working on his own, without benefit of collaboration, he has cooked up some amiable monkeyshines, and saluted his old partner in authorship by naming one of his characters, a lady soldier of the Soviets, Chodorov.

Gold Diggers

The other three beauties about whom the plot reels dizzily are just lilies, so to speak, of the Fields. Knowing the close connection between war and sex they occupy, often against the wishes of the hotel manager, a suite in a capital hotel, and dig quietly for gold. Since they are practical as well as beautiful, they dig for it among the stars on a general or in an admiral's braid, though they do not neglect the usual civilian mines.

Their chief problem, however, is getting to the altar, a devious journey on which the play provides many detours. If anyone of them gets a suitable male within shouting distance of the marriage vows something happens—something fatal like the gentleman's wife turning up, or a jealous general ordering the impending groom off to battle.

Just as the FBI takes a hand and decides that the girls are too much strain on the war effort and ought to be evacuated to some less amorous neighborhood their luck changes and a national crisis is averted. Their three suitors turn up, legally unencumbered, for further nuptials and with the hasty blessing of a Russian priest one pair goes off to luncheon at the White House.

If Mr. Fields' little story is as flimsy as a piece of tissue paper, at least Mr. Kaufman blows it around in some gusty patterns, and keeps it dancing. When it seems likely to settle to earth it gets a fresh flurry of laughter and manages to sail up again. Its buoyance becomes hard to sustain in the last act, which is over-long and slightly saggy, but the frantic wedding scene finally gives the play a clean send-off. It leaves them laughing.

Expert Cast

Mr. Fields gets most of his fun not out of the plight of his ladies so much as out of the Washington atmosphere, the huddle of politicians, officers, dollar a year men, and so on. While the viewpoint is not always steady, nor as sharply satirical as it is, for instance, in "Of Thee I Sing," it does provide amusing sallies against the cellophane warriors, inflated egoes and similar by-products of Mars.

Mr. Kaufman has assembled an expert cast, some of them veterans of his own shows, and he has directed the whole thing with the speed, inventiveness and comic emphasis of his special trade-marked hilarity. The four ladies (three of them waiting) are played by such expert comediennes as Virginia Field, Arleen Whelan, Doris Nolan and Arlene Francis. Miss Nolan's lines aren't quite up to the others, and Miss Francis is especially amusing as the Soviet lady sergeant.

The gentlemen rush about on the joint errands of sex and war (in the order named) and they are portrayed genially by Reed Brown, Jr., King Calder, William J. Kelly and Vinton Hayworth.

Altogether, the capers they cut are amusing and make up a diverting side-show of off-duty war lords engaged in a strategic but unofficial and laughable battle of the sexes.

NEW YORK TIMES
December 31, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW
"The Doughgirls"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

"THE DOUGHGIRLS" opened at the Lyceum Theatre last evening, and all was immediately well on Broadway again. For Joseph Fields, who seems to be involved in most of the amusing plays these days, has flung together a mad salute to wartime Washington, and George S. Kaufman has staged the whole so that it is very funny indeed. During the course of the evening it even stopped raining, as though Max Gordon, with his authoritative Capital connections, had gotten to J. Pluvius so that Times Square could enjoy itself once more, inside the theatre and out.

Washington's housing is Mr. Fields' oyster, and, cracking it, he has found many pearls. Some of them may be cultured, of course, and not natural, but on the next to the last day of 1942 such things no longer matter. For into the Fields hotel prowl many a weird character—women unmarried to their mates, a Russian lady guerrilla sniper, soldiers, sailors, strangers in search of only a bed. They speak in the best form of wise-crack, they are ribald and riotous, and when they run out of conversation, as they sometimes do, there is Mr. Kaufman standing in the wings to wave them on with the best directorial baton for comedy in the business. "The Doughgirls" will be at it for some time to come.

Mr. Fields has hired a suite in one of the better hotels. First, there is one couple, unmarried, of course; then two, then three. The Russian lady sniper, who has killed 397 Nazis, comes over from the embassy, and then an admiral, a general and, at times, the head of the rubber commission. Also a judge from Montana, an Army chaplain, a Russian priest and those listed as "sailors, marines, house staff and messengers," who keep bobbing in and out at intervals while the telephone rings constantly to announce a new crisis.

• • •

For the three doughgirls they have Virginia Field, Arleen Whelan and Doris Nolan, all of whom would be a credit, individually and collectively, to both Washington and a theatre east of Seventh Avenue in the Forties. Miss Whelan, as a not very bright young lady who gets work with the War Department and causes some one to say, "Well, that will change the betting," is especially good. In the role of Natalia Chodorov, the Russian sniper, is Arlene Francis, who is marvelous. Badly done, the part could conceivably cause resentment—but never as Miss Francis plays it with a disarming smile and enormous goodwill. Her part is the best in the play, and she increases it.

King Calder, Reed Brown, Jr., and Vinton Hayworth are the three men who are tangled up with the doughgirls and constant trouble. William J. Kelly is good as the Army general and Thomas F. Tracey as the admiral. Sydney Grant also is excellent with a smallish part as the assistant manager of the hotel, who never is quite certain when the bills are to be met. Frederick Fox must have waited his turn in a Washington hotel to design the living room of a fine suite, with extra heavy hinges on the doors to take the slamming. And with "The Doughgirls," Mr. Fields seems to have three hits on Broadway, for he also is co-author of "My Sister Eileen" and "Junior Miss."

"The Doughgirls"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 31, 1942

"Doughgirls" Pokes Fun at Wartime Washington Cheats

"The Doughgirls," comedy by Joseph Fields. Produced by Max Gordon at the Lyceum Theatre, New York, Dec. 30, 1942.

★ ★ ★—

By BURNS MANTLE

THE Army captain sitting in the row in front of your reporter at the Lyceum theatre last night laughed himself sway-backed at the fairly brutal jabs Joseph Fields takes at the indoor-officer set assigned to military duty in wartime Washington.

That, I suppose, should presage a military OK on "The Doughgirls," which is Mr. Fields' new comedy. I wouldn't know whether this Captain is a regular, or only a volunteer, but I assume he is regular. A volunteer would have been looking around to see whether or not his boss was watching.

The white list protectors, on the other hand, will probably be putting a red check against "The Doughgirls," seeing it is the author's contention that these same uniformed desk men are much more interested in sex than they are in their jobs.

The pattern of "The Doughgirls" is strongly reminiscent of that of "The Greeks Had a Word for It." In this case three decorative ladies on the make find themselves registered as the wives of a desk Colonel, a flying Captain and a war equipment salesman in the same hotel in Washington.

In One Suite

Because there are no other rooms to be had, and because the girls are old-time secretarial buddies, they are all crowded into the same suite.

This consolidates the group's activities, and introduces as callers an amorous Brigadier General, a tomcat Admiral on temporary land duty, and a dollar-a-year synthetic rubber magnate who is also a fancier of beauty on the hoof.

The complications are concerned largely with sleeping accommodations and schedules. Hurdles are put in the way of divorces necessary before the dallying husbands can marry their new loves. The FBI takes a hand in registering the fingerprints of the ladies and, later, in suggesting that they remove themselves from the Washington scene for the good of the service.

But it happens, with the aid of a four-week lapse of time, that the flying Captain has a chance to get across the Pacific and sink a Jap airplane carrier, and get back for his medal and an invitation from the Roosevelts for luncheon at the White House.

It also happens that the Captain is able to complete his wedding ceremony in the nick of time, with the help of a Russian priest, which serves to preserve White House social standards, in the eyes of Author Fields at least.

Favorable Features

It is all frankly extravagant, and never at all believable. But the dialogue is snappy, the characters are definitely drawn, the action is lively and often amusing, and the whole thing is handsomely staged and clothed.

The individual performances are all good, and that helps. The girls are strikingly visualized and naturally played by Virginia Field, Arleen Whelan and Doris Nolan, better known to the Hollywood cameras than to the Broadway stage of recent months.

Arlene Francis contributes a choice satire of a Russian army woman sniper that may conceivably stir diplomatic complications with an ally. William J. Kelly is a perfect model of a perfectly stuffed Brigadier General. There are more or less straight parts well played by Reed Brown, Jr., Edward Robins, Vinton Hayworth, King Calder, Reynolds Evans, Thomas F. Tracey, Ethel Wilson, Harold Grau.

The attractive setting is by Frederick Fox, and George Kaufman's direction has the old, familiar and effective Kaufman touch.

NEW YORK POST
December 31, 1942

"The Doughgirls" a Tasteless Farce About Wartime Washington

By WILELLA WALDORF

MAX GORDON has given "The Doughgirls" the benefit of a smooth production, smart clothes, an excellent cast and the services of one of Broadway's most skillful directors, George S. Kaufman. It is a pity all this magnificence should be wasted on a poor farce about wartime Washington that is not only unfunny most of the time, but also in very bad taste.

Joseph Fields, author of "The Doughgirls," which moved into the Lyceum last night, was co-author with Jerome Chodorov of "My Sister Eileen" and "Junior Miss," both of which had their origin in sketches that appeared in the New Yorker. As far as we know, Mr. Fields' new solo venture originated in his own mind, and it is no credit to him.

The "Doughgirls" gives us six weeks in a Washington hotel with three young women whose sole aim in life is to hook a man capable of maintaining them in the luxury to which they have become accustomed. Since they are registered as married women, they would like to make things legal all around, but with the crowded condition of the National Capital, their suite is about as private as the Union Station and their plans are complicated by a parade of generals, admirals and government officials, susceptible males with apparently very little to do but ogle the girlies.

Hard on a Good Company

The first act of "The Doughgirls" is so dull that the play was bound to improve a little as it went on. It could hardly do anything else. But the laughs are remarkably few for a farce upon which so much attention, and cash, have been lavished, and most of what amusement there is comes, not from the lines, but from Mr. Kaufman's neat touches as director, and the smart work of some of the cast, notably Virginia Field, who seldom misses an opportunity to make the vapid prattle sound almost clever as she speaks it.

Miss Field deserves better stuff than this, and so do the others. Arlene Francis, in a take-off on the lady sniper from Russia only recently in our midst, gives an ingratiating performance that makes something gay and charming out of a rather poor attempt at caricature, while Doris Nolan and Arleen Whelan are both exceedingly decorative as two of the visiting females.

Miss Whelan has the misfortune to make her Broadway debut as a nit-wit whose purely imaginary services as secretary to a susceptible brigadier-general give her the run of the War Dept. with all of its thrilling military secrets. The part is outrageously overdrawn and few people could get away with it as cheerfully as Miss Whelan does. Her lovely complexion and beautiful mop of red hair help a lot.

Natalie Schafer has one scene that lifts the play out of the doldrums for a few minutes, and the large company is generally capable. Of the men, all of whom are worms of one sort or another, William J. Kelly gives a wryly amusing performance as the brigadier general from Wall St.

Mr. Kaufman, as director, has dragged in everything he or anyone else ever heard, read or saw in a cartoon about the over-crowded condition of Washington's hotels, and now and then he has overstepped himself and put in one gag too many, or carried an old joke much too far.

It's Going to Be a Long War

It was the brigadier-general who remarked sadly in the middle of the play:

"Sometimes I think it's going to be a long war."

If Washington, D. C., is anything like it is pictured in "The Doughgirls" we not only agree with the general, but fear it may not only be a long war but a war that our side can hardly help losing.

"The Doughgirls," of course, is only a farce designed to amuse, but it's such an unfunny farce most of the way that we found it hard to forgive its display of poor taste in times like these.

NEW YORK SUN
December 31, 1942

'The Doughgirls,' a Cheerful Farce, Opens at The Lyceum Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

AS CHEERFUL a bit of foolishness as you'd want to see popped up last evening at the Lyceum, the contribution of Joseph Fields and George S. Kaufman to the cause of innocent—well, reasonably innocent—merriment. For reasons which could hardly have been quite clear even to the author, it is called "The Doughgirls." It is about some young women who are having a confusing time in Washington and it runs with the effortless precision of electric clockwork.

Mr. Fields, who thought it up, describes the unlikely exploits of three extremely handsome young women who collect, by a kind of magic, in a Washington hotel suite. They are all entrancing and only one of them is noticeably dim-witted; they all have men and each hopes, eventually, to achieve matrimony, going toward it by easy stages. Meanwhile, each takes the will for the deed. And, meanwhile, people drop in, as is perhaps the way of life in Washington.

The play is made up, as farce should be, of funny strangers popping in and out, of odd complications, of strange catastrophes. One girl, to advance the colonel whose name she is wearing on approval, involves herself with a general. An admiral comes into it and a Russian sha; pshootress; there is a man who wanders sadly in at intervals looking for a bed; the FBI is engaged in a baffled fashion and the hotel bills mount frantically. A semi-detached wife reappears and is momentarily re-attached, to the embarrassment of almost everybody. A chaplain is innocently horrified on the eve of a marriage ceremony, which eventually is performed by a Russian priest. Doors and wisecracks bang constantly; a rubber czar is dethroned and one of the ladies is invited to the White House.

Mr. Fields has put these things together with the dexterity of a man who can make farce out of unreasonable odds and ends. (Mr. Fields, co-author of "My Sister Eileen" and "Junior Miss," has had experience). His dialogue is not, to be sure, always as funny as he hopes. In such cases, Mr. Kaufman's direction fills in. Mr. Kaufman can get around little things like that, and does. What "The Doughgirls" lacks in wit it makes up in frivolity and cheerful giddiness.

It is acted jauntily by ornamental people —by Arleen Whelan, prettily baffled redhead; Virginia Field, Doris Nolan, Arlene Francis —who has to lug a target rifle everywhere she goes—Natalie Schafer and some mere men, including King Calder, Reed Brown, Jr., William J. Kelly, Vinton Hayworth and, a lot more, almost all of them fun to watch. It is all very smooth, very adroit and from where I was sitting—F 114—very amusing.

"The Russian People"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 30, 1942

'The Russian People' Dramatic Report from the Soviet Front

"The Russian People," drama by Konstantin Simonov. American version by Clifford Odets. Produced by the Theatre Guild, Inc., at the Guild Theatre, Dec. 29, 1942.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

KONSTANIN SIMONOV files a report from the Soviet front in "The Russian People." It is a factual, day-by-day report of the reception of German invaders in an occupied town. It's shot with tragedy and filled with a deeply sympathetic respect for the loyal little people who are carrying on the fight at the Russian front and in back of the lines.

It lacks something of the cumulative dramatic drive of "Winter Soldiers," recently shown at the Studio Theatre in West 12th St., but suggests a more intimate and perhaps a more authentic study of Russian character.

These fighting loyalists are simple people at heart. The chief military officer engaged, he being Comrade Captain Safonov, has a time of it taking the army with a proper seriousness. He would, if he could, call the whole thing off and return to the peaceful pursuits that held him before war came.

Little Valya, his dependable aid and chauffeur, is conventionally feminine under her uniform, and quite in love with the Captain, but a brave and determined fighter for the cause and one who sacrifices herself courageously.

Flaring Hate

So it is with all the comrades. War is new to them, and a detested occupation. But the hatred they bear the enemy is soul-deep and ineradicable. They stand with Stalin and with the motherland; stand to win or to die; and do a lot of both.

Short of rations, short of water, and entirely surrounded by Hitler's invaders, they man a guerrilla garrison and cheerfully carry on. They uncover a spy and shoot him, though he turns out to be the nephew of the officer who uncovers his guilt.

They send a poet into the thick of a forlorn hope. A pre-war playboy drinks his vodka and sings his farewell to his comrades. He'll not be back; he knows that.

A mother of soldiers defies a Nazi to hang her, but before he can do that hurls the curses of all mothers upon the butchers of her son. A lady of the village, cursed with a quisling husband, poisons the tea of her tormentor and goes exultantly to her death, dragging her weakling mate after her.

Good Types

The Theatre Guild, with Harold Clurman of the Group Theatre serving as director, has enlisted a cast of both known and unknown actors to fit the Russian types. They serve well, though with a variety of dialects not easily mastered.

The leads are played by Leon Ames, the gentle comrade captain, and Elisabeth Fraser, the ingenue who came suddenly to prominence in "There Shall Be No Night," as his aide. Elisabeth is a grown up actress now, and effectively dramatic in the scene of her Nazi-defiance.

Luther Adler plays the reclaimed playboy with experienced actor judgment. Margaret Waller is superbly dramatic in her own scene of defiance. Eleonora Mendelssohn applies the tragic dignity of her well-schooled art to the role of the poisoning wife.

Herbert Berghof is the poet. Peter Hobbs a worthy veteran of earlier wars, Victor Varconi the unhappy spy, and E. A. Krumschmidt the quisling husband. There are also many short parts competently played.

The settings are serviceable, and in the Russian manner. Boris Aronson probably copied them from the Moscow originals. There is a small chorus of Russian singers replacing the orchestra.

Last night's audience seemed impressed rather than enthused. Which is a reasonable reception for a factual report from any front these days.

'THE RUSSIAN PEOPLE'

A play in three acts by Konstantin Simonov; American acting version by Clifford Odets; directed by Harold Clurman; designed by Boris Aronson; presented at the Guild Theater by the Theater Guild on December 29, 1942. The cast:

Martha Safonova	Margaret Waller
Maria Kharitonova	Eleonora Mendelssohn
Kozlovsky	Eduard Franz
Valya	Elisabeth Fraser
Morozov	Robert Simon
Wounded Man	Ernest Graves
Safonov	Leon Ames
Borisov	Randolph Echols
Shura	Anna Minot
Vasin	Victor Varconi
Panin	Herbert Berghof
Lieut. Vasilyev	Peter Hobbs
Globa	Luther Adler
Old Man	Joseph Shattuck
Second Old Man	Jefferson Coates
Rosenberg	Rudolph Anders
Werner	Harold Dyrenforth
Kharitonov	E. A. Krumschmidt
Unknown Man	Harro Meller
Red Army Man	Ad Karns
Sentry	Jon Dawson
Captain Gavrilov	Roger Beirne
Krasny	Walter Kohler
German Soldier	David Koser
Semyonov	Mark Schweid
Major General Lukonin	Robert Simon
Signal Man	Michael Strong

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
December 30, 1942

The Russian People Opens at the Guild

By BURTON RASCOE

HAVE you ever watched children play war in a vacant lot? They use sticks and mop handles for firearms and artillery pieces. Their defense positions are behind cardboard boxes and orange crates. Their tanks are cigar boxes pushed by hand. They make a great deal of noise and run around excitedly yelling, "Bang! Bang! You're dead!" Sometimes a combatant refuses to be convinced by this announcement and yells back, "No, I'm not! You are dead, yourself! Bang! Bang! Bang!" Most of the time they don't stop to argue over this difference of opinion, but go after more amenable victims of their carnage; and when they do argue, they wax very angry for a few seconds and hurl at each other uncomplimentary epithets like, "You sissy!" or "You dumb-ox!" and then run off in opposite directions yelling, "Bang! Bang! Bang!"

I am reminded of this by thinking how much more real and convincing is the war drama and the play of emotion among kids at their war play in vacant lots than was the simulation by grownups of the same thing at the Guild last night. At least when you watch the kids you have the conviction that the illusion they are creating for themselves is, for the moment, very real to them. There was not a member of the cast last night who seemed to me to feel for a moment that he was anything more than an Equity member with a contract with the Guild to appear in costume and go through the lines and motions of a melodrama of the vintage of the gaslit era.

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Blessed by Soviet Embassy

The monstrous thing is that the play is called The Russian People, and it arrived last night as the anticlimax of a great huliabalioo about its being the first great Soviet drama. From the Embassy of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics in Washington I received the Embassy's thrice-weekly Information Bulletin, one whole issue — eight embossed pages — of which is devoted to the first American presentation of Konstantin Simonov and his play. The bulletin contains a biography of Simonov (he's 27 years old), fulsome critiques by eminent Soviet essayists on the drama, a note by Lan Adomian on the music used in The Soviet People, and, last but not least, an interview with Clifford Odets, who made the American version, on the meaning and the high merit of the drama.

"The truth about man in our Patriotic War," writes Gospodin Borisov, the noted Soviet critic, "is the basic content of this play, and truth is its principal hero. . . . The blood of the Russian people . . . is its labor, its mentality, its sweat, its will and its character. In this blood is the deepest love for the motherland, the firm resolution to defend it against everything with supreme heroism. . . . The moral appearance of such a people is pure and bright. Great simplicity and a many-sided spiritual richness are united in it. Consciousness of duty and the capacity to fulfill this duty worthily give it noble distinction. Its humanism is born of great wrath, fury and hatred of evil are fed by love for the motherland and her freedom, for progress and labor, for humanity and justice. Such is the Russian man. Such is the Soviet man. His life, his deeds, his beauty is what gives our art its content at this time. This man is the hero of Konstantin Simonov's play."

After reading all this with emotion enkindled by Henry Shapiro's marvelous dispatches from the Red Army on the Stalingrad front to this newspaper, for the first time in my life I conceived, before I saw a play, the review I was to write of it. That review was to have been a masterpiece of eloquence and persuasion, dear reader. It was to pay my humble tribute to our gallant allies, the Russian people. It was to celebrate the new art of the theater as the dawn of it was expressed in the Soviet drama by its most gifted dramatist, Konstantin Simonov. From Gospodin Adomian's notes, in advance, I heard Russian folk music—the music of the Red Army—the songs of the unchained Russian people—running all through the play in a subdued and subtle manner, breaking out occasionally into Cossack and martial challenge, and giving emotional force to the play as does the incidental music in the movies.

Play a Libel on Russians

Alas, my masterpiece will never be written. The Russian People is not a tribute to the Russian people; it is a libel on them. It is almost a burlesque of the old ten-twenty-thirty melodrama. There is nothing real, convincing, believable about it. The situations are ancient and trivial, dramatically speaking; it is the very apotheosis, in theatrical content, of what the Soviet writers used to deride as "bourgeois ideology." One paragraph from General Christiakov's remarkable statement to Mr. Shapiro on the defense of Stalingrad puts to shame, in dramatic force and eloquence, the whole Simonov tintinnabulation.

The action takes place in a partly occupied Russian town, from which the Germans are driven at the final curtain by supers in Russian uniforms, and carrying rifles with bayonets fixed, who rush in and clutter up the stage. Meanwhile there is a love affair brewing between the garrison captain and the girl scout (Russian type) who swims the ice-bound river three times on dangerous missions through the enemy lines, is captured and rescued; and there is some spying on both sides and some conventional demonstrations of the brutality of the Germans.

The casting is unbelievably inept. Leon Ames as a Russian garrison commander acted and talked like a grade B movie juvenile and was about as Russian as Gene Autrey. Elisabeth Fraser is a blond cutie, who acted as though she were playing the lead in a high school entertainment, although she was supposed to be a tough-minded Amazon. And not even Luther Adler could break through the wooden role he was given and make it real. . . . Herbert Berghof as a traitor and Jefferson Coates as an old man who speaks no lines, were the only ones who brought even a moment of conviction into the general grotesque disillusion of the play. . . . The Guild, in this instance, has done our Russian ally a disservice

"The Russian People"

NEW YORK POST
December 30, 1942

The Theatre Guild Presents Simonov's "The Russian People"

By WILELLA WALDORF

THIS is an appropriate time to introduce New York to a play called "The Russian People," written by Konstantin Simonov, one of the U. S. S. R.'s most celebrated war correspondents. Just before the premiere at the Guild Theatre last night, the news came over the radio that the Rusian Army had captured another important railroad center ninety miles southwest of Stalingrad.

Now the Theatre Guild presents a dramatic tribute to the Army, and the people, who have fought off the Germans for so long, and are again taking the offensive against the enemy with more success than many observers had believed possible.

Perhaps, under the circumstances, we went to the Guild expecting too much from "The Russian People." As a patriotic tribute to a heroic nation written to be played far and wide in Soviet theatres, it must have served its purpose well. As a drama of Russia and the Russians, seething with the sound and fury of the front lines, it is interesting but hardly arresting as presented in Fifty-second Street.

The author tells his story in nine scenes, leaping back and forth across the river from a town occupied by the Germans, to the remnant of a Russian force all but cut off from the Red Army.

A shortage of food, water, ammunition and manpower harasses the garrison whose headquarters is a deserted railway station, but the captain who has assumed command when his superior officers are all killed decides to hold out until orders are received from the general of the main body of Russian troops fighting its way toward them.

In the meantime the Germans across the river have set up headquarters in the home of a terrified Russian who has betrayed his own people.

Many of the characters in "The Russian People" are well drawn, and it is in showing us the spirit of resistance to the death animating most of them that Mr. Simonov is chiefly interested.

The weak and treacherous are despised as spies and traitors. The sniveling villager who allows himself to be named mayor by the Germans is hated by his own wife. The shifty youth who spies on the Russian camp for the enemy is exposed and shot by order of his uncle, an old officer of Czarist days now fighting in the Red Army.

Nor are Soviet audiences, apparently, averse to a dash of love interest. The captain, an ingratiating fellow pleasantly played by Leon Ames, is in love with the blonde maiden who acts as chauffeur to the troops and on occasion swims the river carrying messages to the occupied village. Elisabeth Fraser acts this role effectively without seeming more than fleetingly ridiculous. The part of the girl soldier, the lady spy, has a way of becoming a little foolish and stagey even in such an obviously sincere and authentic drama as "The Russian People."

Luther Adler as Globa, a Russian Army physician who acts as a spy on occasion, is generally excellent, although he does succumb now and then to a passion for lush, elaborately contrived effects which mar the genial, warm-hearted quality of the role. He is abetted in this tendency by Mr. Clurman, the stage director, who sometimes becomes so breathless over a scene that one can see the theatrical wheels going round a little too clearly.

Herbert Berghof as a journalist turned soldier and Eduard Franz as a Russian turned informer to the Germans also stand out in the large company, as does Rudolph Anders as a particularly fiendish German officer, who is fed poison in his tea and deserves it.

A Reminder of "Winter Soldiers"

Only a few weeks ago a play by an American, Dan James, entitled, "Winter Soldiers," was produced here at the Studio Theatre in Twelfth Street. Also done in numerous scenes, it too dealt with the heroic resistance of the Russian people and their sympathizers in the occupied countries.

"Winter Soldiers" had its faults as a piece of play making, but in some respects we found it more exciting, and more moving, than "The Russian People," which comes to us straight from Russia, via Clifford Odets and the Theatre Guild.

"The Russian People" is worth seeing, but it is not the memorable experience we had been hoping for.

NEW YORK TIMES
December 30, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"The Russian People"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

IT WOULD be more than agreeable to report this morning that all of "The Russian People" is as good as its best parts. For it is the first play to come out of Russia in a long, long time, and, as written by one who is on the scene, it tells the story of a magnificent and courageous people in their fight against the Nazi invader. Clifford Odets has made an American version of the Konstantin Simonov script, and the Theatre Guild, with its usual care, has given it an excellent production. But the fact remains that, barring a few scenes, the play does not rise to the heights of the spirit of the people it represents, and almost all of its earlier passages are confused and sluggish.

When the play is good, it is very good. The author wrote it when he was on the Russian front as a newspaper correspondent, and some of the things he has seen he sets down in white heat. When Mr. Odets and his American cast reach these passages, they contribute some of the most horrifying realism to be found on the stage—a realism that can give a hint of what the Russians have been through during this war. But not always do the people come alive, and in the first act their relationships to each other present a puzzle that seems almost insoluble. The spirit of the new and fighting Russia Mr. Odets gets and passes on, but the reasons and the background not always are so clear.

* * *

It is a story of a beleaguered Russia, of its armies and more especially of its guerillas—who, after all, are the people brought to unexpected arms to defend their homes. Its scenes range from the headquarters of a unit that has been cut off, but is fighting with the hope the Russian advance will reach them, to a German headquarters in the occupied part of a town. Its characters are those of war and occupation, the soldiers, young and old, thrown suddenly into the fight, the loyal people helping from behind the German lines. There are Germans of the occupying army, and there also is a Quisling. The Russian people are from all stations: a professional soldier, an old warrior of the Czar, a girl, a stenographer, a writer—this last suggesting a sly self-portrait by the author.

It is in several scenes at the Nazi headquarters that Playwright Simonov and his American cousins are the most effective. One when the German commander plays with the Quisling and his wife, telling them that their son has been killed, is the acme of pure horror. And earlier in the play, in a very moving moment, it is the girl who gives a very beautiful description of her country, gives the reasons she has become one of the fighting Russian people. It is a simple matter of two birth trees outside her window at home; that is all she remembers, but it is enough.

With Harold Clurman directing, the Guild has acquired Leon Ames, Luther Adler and Elisabeth Fraser for the play's three leading roles. Mr. Ames is the commanding officer of the unit, Miss Fraser a volunteer, Mr. Adler an officer who also can put on peasant clothes and cross the river to the occupied town and mislead the Germans. Victor Varconi has an excellent part, and so plays it, as the former fighter for the Czar; Herbert Berghof is the writer who suddenly finds himself directing intelligence, and E. G. Krumschmidt is the Quisling. Rudolph Anders has the role of the German officer, and plays it as though inviting some member of the audience to jump up and shoot him; when more horrifying characters are created, Mr. Anders should have them. Boris Aronson designed the settings, which fit the play and its mood perfectly.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 30, 1942

Soviet War Drama

By HOWARD BARNES

THE Theater Guild has chosen a propitious time to present the Soviet war drama, "The Russian People." This Konstantin Simonov account of guerilla warfare and civilian heroism has immediacy and impact. Endowed with an effective production and some first-rate acting, it gives dramatic contours to the magnificent struggle that is reaching a new climax on the Russian front. Unfortunately, the play, as it is offered at the Guild Theater, is so sprawling in outline and uneven in texture that it affords only a dim reflection of world-shaking events.

* * *

The Simonov play is a great success in Russia at the moment, which is easy to understand. What changes it has undergone in its Americanization are impossible to report on, but it is probable that they have been of a minor nature. The chief defect in "The Russian People" is its very vitality and the savagery of its attack. Half a dozen plays unfold at the Guild. Each of them is given lurid melodramatic emphasis. As a propagandist in a great cause Simonov hits hard and forcefully. As a dramatist, he is undisciplined, occasionally wordy and wanting in the tough unity that makes a war play good theater as well as a challenging battle cry.

Clifford Odets, who has made over the Russian script, has not been too successful in giving fluency and clarity to the work. His English colloquialisms are not always apt. His editing might have included more incisive cutting. As it stands, "The Russian People" is a vivid and sometimes moving stage pageant of a valiant conflict, but it leads one to guess that the conflict it tries to dramatize may always elude the medium of the theater. Individual scenes have great power and even emotional intensity, but the action either falls into rather tedious stretches of exposition or explosive flashes of too obvious melodrama.

* * *

The plot is so complicated that it is difficult to give more than a brief summary. Suffice it to say that it centers chiefly on a valiant band of Soviet soldiers and civilians, trapped behind the German advance until it is relieved by one of those Russian advances which have kept Hitler on his heels for some time now. There is a romance of sorts, between the guerilla captain and a woman reconnaissance scout, and there are several scenes of Nazi atrocities interlarded in the main current of the work. The characters are sometimes whole and tremendously convincing. Often they are two dimensional.

* * *

The acting realizes all the best aspects of the production. Luther Adler, in particular, is wonderfully good as a man in love with life who gladly faces death to expedite a blow at the Nazi invaders. Elisabeth Fraser gives a thoughtful and modulated portrayal of the heroine; Leon Ames is fittingly direct as the captain and Eleonora Mendelssohn is fine as a brave Russian mother who would rather hang than curry favor with neurasthenic thugs. The whole company deserves commendation. It does better by "The Russian People," in fact, than some of its material deserves. Harold Clurman's staging, incidentally, is knowing, but a bit too theatrical for a treatment of a somber and moving theme.

"The Russian People"

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
December 30, 1942

Simonov War Play Reveals Heroic Red Stand Against German Invaders

By JOHN ANDERSON

SEEING a play written by a Russian about the Russian Army and the unfaltering courage of a people's war ought to give us a thrilling glimpse behind the headlines from Moscow and Stalingrad. It ought to let us feel the heroic spirit that Hitler found tougher than all the Nazi armies he could hurl against it—tougher than Winter, tougher than steel.

Yet in spite of its admirable passages, its poignant moments, and scattered scenes of fine effect, Konstantin Simonov's war play, "The Russian People," presented last night by the Theatre Guild, at the Guild Theatre, is finally disappointing. Its nine loosely designed episodes are too incidental to carry a strong plot and, instead of building up great momentum and stunning emotional impact, the play dawdles and droops and loses the color, vitality and exhilaration of its material. "Winter Soldiers," written by an American, right here in New York, is a better play than this and more exciting.

Simple Heroism

The ineffectiveness of Simonov's play is due partly to its episodic construction, the slow-paced solemnity of its direction, and partly to the official point of view it expresses. This point of view is that the characters are not special but typical, that their heroism is simple and natural, and therefore untheatrical. Yet in translation, before an American audience, the tale plainly demands the pitch, tension and heightened effect of sheer theatre.

In the course of its nine scenes we see a cowardly Mayor of a partly-occupied Russian town playing ball with the Nazis and being tortured by them. We see his wife, in one blazing scene of redemption, superbly acted by Eleonora Mendelssohn, striking back at the enemy and killing a Nazi officer. Then we see the Russian officers on the other side of the river, preparing to drive the Germans out. We see the single-hearted spirit of the soldier comrades, men and women, young and old, and we watch a spy as he is caught in his own traitorous trap. And we see, at the end, the self-sacrifice of men and women giving their lives superbly so that the Russians may recapture the town.

But instead of achieving suspense and the high tension of momentous drama, the separate episodes have a sort of static, lantern-slide quality that leaves the play, in its emotional peak, not much greater at the end than in the beginning.

Skillful Version

It is easy to guess that for audiences in its native land, Simonov's play needs no more than that, needs to win no higher dramatic level than it reaches as a simple document of courage. But even in the skillful, adroitly colloquial acting version made by Clifford Odets for the present occasion, it doesn't do much more for its subject than the documentary film on Russia at war, pieced up and patched together as it was, that was shown here last Winter.

Even on its own terms the play needs drastic editing. Some of the incidents are reiterative; some altogether unnecessary. The Guild's heavy production with Mr. Aronson's too lavish and too literal, and in one instance too obscure settings, is too elaborate for a play whose chief virtues are its elemental simplicity and honesty.

Faced with many scenes of scattering effect, Mr. Clurman's usually dynamic direction labors under a serious handicap. There is no point towards which he can build a mounting tempo, and so the episodes are done, where the material permits, in vivid, and sometimes brilliant, spots. But the effect remains spotty, the movement uneven, and now and then sluggish.

Grim Warrior

The performances suffer from the same defect, tending to be showy at one moment and dim the next. As the Russian captain who is the heroic focus of the action, Leon Ames provides a direct but not very interesting portrait. In a different key Luther Adler misses the honest level of the writing in spurging staginess. Victor Varconi is excellent as a grim old warrior, and Eduard Franz suggests an obvious spy somewhat obviously.

Elisabeth Fraser sustains the small romantic interest of the play in a simple and attractive performance, E. A. Krumschmidt provides a superb sketch of the cowardly Mayor, and Herbert Berghof makes the most of a somewhat miscellaneous journalist. The aforementioned Miss Mendelssohn and Margaret Waller give vivid impressions of embattled Russian womanhood.

Since we have produced only one good American war play so far—"The Eve of St. Mark"—and England none (though a fine motion picture, "In Which We Serve"), we are in no position to complain about Russia's war drama.

But it is a lucky thing that armies travel on something more substantial than their playwrights.

NEW YORK SUN
December 30, 1942

'The Russian People,' Soviet War Drama, Is Offered at the Guild Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

A VITAL, courageous play has come out of Russia, a by-product of the Russians' heroic defense of their homeland. It is Konstantin Simonov's "The Russian People," adapted by Clifford Odets and presented last evening by the Theater Guild at its own theater. It is by no means perfect drama. Sometimes it scatters its effects and now and then blurs them. But in sum it is alive and vivid and at its best stirring.

It tells of men and women of the Soviets in war. One of them is the loquacious, competent captain of one of those small army detachments which, being surrounded and cut off, did, not seem to realize they were beaten and so kept on fighting. His detachment is fighting in the lesser half of one of those "populated places" which Russian communiques so frequently, obscurely, mention. His second in command is a one-time Czarist officer; his chief of intelligence is a lost journalist; his best scout is a small, lithe girl who is in love with him. And there is a jaunty surgeon who walks off singing to inevitable death.

The people, as is so frequently true in drama out of Russia, make the play. There are many more. There is a cowardly mayor playing the Germans' game and his wife, who finally will no longer play it. There is an old woman, mother of the captain, whose house is a rendezvous for Russian agents, and who in the end is hanged. There is a cowardly traitor, for Simonov is not a writer to stamp out only heroic robots. There is a sadistic Nazi and a soldierly one and all these people, even the Germans, are individuals, wanting different things, courageous and afraid—and interesting.

There is enough action, particularly after the first rather slow act, to provide the theater's excitements. There is spying and counter-spying. Guns rumble off-stage and flare in plain sight; the fireworks are generally satisfying. (The Russians win, too, and the girl's lover arrives in time to save her, so that a sound core of melodrama is provided.) But what the play is about is a great many not very important people fighting with courage against invaders and planning for the vengeance which will one day be theirs. What the play does is to reflect some part of that heroism; reflect it factually and convincingly and without hysteria. Simonov is a good hater and his play shows it. But his is a deep hate rather than a showy flicker. "The Russian People" is never shrill.

It should be pulled more tightly together for the theater. It is often discursive, since the author has a fondness for "characters." It does not always concentrate on its main story. But it is always absorbing.

Under Harold Clurman's direction, the large cast plays it admirably. Luther Adler acts the swaggering, heroic doctor convincingly and with zest; Leon Ames, once you decide to accept him as a Russian, is fine as the captain; Elisabeth Fraser gives a vivid performance as the girl; Eleonora Mendelssohn is, in her big scene, excitingly good as the wife of the craven mayor. There are excellent performances by Eduard Franz, Margaret Waller, Victor Varconi, Herbert Berghof and many others, some of whom are permanently lost to me behind their Russian names.

"The Russian People" is a tonic for a theater which seems of late to have contracted anemia.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
December 30, 1942

A Great Story Remains Untold

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

SET beside the run of English and American war plays we have had on Broadway, *The Russian People* has more purposefulness and, at its best, more force; but on the whole it is a grievous disappointment. Perhaps one hopes for too much; perhaps one assumes that the magnificent valor of the Russian armies and the Russian people could not but take flame in the hands of one of their own playwrights. But the theater has its own laws and its own language, and the greater the theme it espouses, the greater must be the talent to match it. Konstantin Simonov lacks that talent, or any approximation of it; and to the shortcomings of the script the Theater Guild's production adds palpable inadequacies of its own.

What seems best about the play is a kind of realistic approach to its subject: the feeling that both the Russians and the Nazis portrayed are fighting a life-or-death battle, are giving no quarter, are untouched by any of the picturesque quirks or romantic lapses that too often figure in war plays. Both sides are hard-bitten and relentless; both sides mean business. The Russians not only know what they are dying for; they know that at any moment, sometimes at the very next moment, they must die. Nor has Simonov too much idealized them: he has tried to paint his characters as human beings and he has not hesitated to make one of them a groveling weakling, and another a despicable traitor.

* * *

But if the play has a realistic approach, it all too frequently lacks a realistic effect. Some of it is too stagey and high-pitched. Some of it is—at the other extreme—merely wooden and weak. It does not take on fuller life, or greater force, as it advances from scene to scene; its climactic moments lose much of their value because they do not have the whole weight of the play behind them. Here and there a good scene emerges; but too often we feel that we should be moved, rather than are; too often we acknowledge the determined spirit of the Russian people from what we know rather than from what we see.

Dramatically, too, *The Russian People* is somewhat unsatisfying: only intermittently is it good theater. The blame for this lies in part, I think, in Mr. Clurman's direction, which tends to be slow and imprecise, and reluctant to pass certain given points. Clifford Odets' English adaptation seems faithful and competent, but the acting, on the whole, is far from inspired. Leon Ames does pretty well in a role for which he seems miscast; Luther Adler has his very good moments and his equally bad ones; Eleonora Mendelssohn shows little of her special quality. In a poorly written part, Elisabeth Fraser does as well as one could expect; and there are satisfactory performances by Herbert Berghof, Rudolph Anders, Margaret Waller and others.

For all its faults, *Winter Soldiers*—which had a brief downtown run at the New School—seems to me a much more integrated, suspenseful, and effective play than *The Russian People*.

"Sweet Charity"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 29, 1942

"Sweet Charity," a Farce About Women, Staged at Mansfield

"Sweet Charity," comedy farce by Irving Brecher and Manuel Seff. Produced by Alfred Bloomingdale at the Mansfield Theatre, New York, Dec. 28, 1942.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

THE report was current some weeks back that "Sweet Charity" was written by Manuel Seff and Irving Brecher as a good-natured attempt to spoof the women's clubs of our neighboring commonwealth of Connecticut.

After Claire Boothe was elected to Congress from that state, however, the boys decided to take down the sign. They shifted their locale to any community the audience wants to select that is "several hundred miles from New York."

Perhaps they were afraid the keen-witted congress woman-elect might decide to put a cap on her victory at the polls by riddling their play as a libel upon the club women of her fair state.

They need not have worried. "Sweet Charity" is too small potatoes for Miss Boothe to fool with.

As shown in a second edition, edited by George Abbott, at the Mansfield theatre last night the play proved a mild little comedy with no more than a leg and a half to stand on.

It is blessed with one hilarious scene and weakened by a farce routine based on familiarly extravagant situations. Club women are funny enough, taken seriously. Ask Helen Hokinson, the New Yorker cartoonist. It is never necessary to make outright fools of them.

These ladies are the officers of a Friendly Hand club. To raise money they have hired King Cole's band to bring his jazz outfit to their town and play for a dance.

After they have sold all the tickets their funds are attached. The band refuses to come without a cash on the line payment of $2,500. The ladies try a variety of simple swindles to raise the money.

Weak Foundation

Just as they are about to complete a deal with the Chamber of Commerce three of their officers discover a box of marihuana cigarettes and, being innocent of the brand, go on a smoking spree that makes them silly instead of sick.

Last night's audience thought this incident was pretty funny, as indeed it was in a wildly extravagant way. It picked up the second act, washed out memories of a dull first act, and gave a little something for the third act to rest on until curtain time.

But again the mistake is made of trying to build entertainment on a weak and implausible foundation. These club women are not as completely caricatured as most of those that reach the stage, but neither are they sufficiently true to type to sustain a reasonable story, even if they had the story.

Phil Loeb and Harlan Briggs are the strength of the comedy, one as a band agent grown suspicious of women's club treasurers, the other as a handy man they press into service to represent a government investigator.

Enid Markey flutters enidmarkedly, Viola Roache is a worthy madame president, Mary Sargent and Jane Seymour play the cigarette scene amusingly.

Mr. Abbott did the directing and Cirker and Robbins built the serviceable set.

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
December 29, 1942

Comedy About Women's Clubs Pokes Fun at the Uplifting Dowagers

By JOHN ANDERSON

FROM the evidence of "Sweet Charity" at the Mansfield last night it appears that the authors, Messrs. Brecher and Seff, have a higher regard for hokum than they have for women's clubs, so they have tied a collection of gags, like so many tin cans, to the uplifting and doubtless uplifted dowagers in the interest of good clean ridicule. To say that they are less subtle than Helen Hokinson's caustic drawings on the same subject is like saying that "Hellzapoppin" is, after all, not Chekhov. Beyond its ardent use of retreaded jokes it seems that any resemblance of "Sweet Charity" to entertainment is almost accidental.

It must be admitted that in the choice of their chief gag the Messrs. Authors show as much good sense as decent reverence for the antique. Their central situation is the old one, tried, true and familiar, in which three upright ladies of impeccable manners and morals, get inadvertently orie-eyed and make spectacular fools of themselves. It has never failed to get a laugh, and after a long and arduous effort, it got its laugh at the Mansfield last night.

Up-to-Date Gag

You know the formula. It used to be that a very prim, prissy, and dignified old girl (probably the heroine's mean maiden aunt), would swig down several cups of punch on the assurance that it was non-alcoholic, only to discover too late that the punch had been spiked. It was always funnier if she was shown to be a strict teetotaler, who hated the stuff until she found herself swinging from the chandelier. If she lost her pantalettes in the proceedings so much the better.

In "Sweet Charity" the Messrs. Authors have merely brought the mechanics of the old gag up to date. They simply arrange matters so that three high-nosed officers of a woman's club, trying to borrow $2,500 from some local moneybags, start to ease their nerves with a smoke, and ignorantly, accidentally, and with humor aforethought, inhale a few marihuanas.

Under the dizzying influence of the giddy weed they kick off their inhibitions as they would their shoes, climb over the furniture and try to pour tea out of the ceiling pot. One of them ultimately attempts to crawl inside a glass water cooler bottle, but apparently without much success. Naturally the money men are horrified, and pick up their checkbooks and go home.

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Screwball Farce

For the space of this well-worn but still serviceable routine "Sweet Charity" manages to strike the comical note it works so desperately hard all evening to sustain. Fore and aft of this balmy passage the play is as arid as a convention of prohibitionists. It takes a long and weary time getting to the scene and it is almost as long and weary winding up afterwards.

Naturally, such material is George Abbott's dish, and it is in this one scene that his talents for screwball farce explain his connection as director with the otherwise lugubrious proceedings. While Jane Seymour, Enid Markey and Mary Sargent illustrate from dead pan to delirium the wayward impulses of the naughty-narcotic, Mr. Abbott's work seems justified. Outside that I can only hope he didn't read the rest of the script.

For the rest of it is a feeble effort to work up amusement over the plight of a woman's club with an empty treasury trying to pay a big time orchestra. The ladies resort to forgery, kidnaping and bribery, and not only is it flat, inconsequential and disastrously irrelevant, but it wastes some excellent performers, who know their way expertly around the public funnybone, notably Harlan Briggs, Philip Loeb and Viola Roache.

They can be funny folks with half a chance, but not with half a gag.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
December 29, 1942

Sweet Charity, a Farce, Opens at the Mansfield

By BURTON RASCOE

IF YOU are clinically minded, you may (if you hurry) observe the untoward effects the smoking of a marijuana cigaret has upon the behavior of three different clubwomen in the second act of a farce called Sweet Charity, by Irving Brecher and Manuel Seff, which opened last night at the Mansfield. The reefer causes one of the ladies to take off her shoes, speak the language of jive and walk over a couch. This performance awakens the spirit of competition in another lady, similarly crocked, who proposes to walk under the couch.

The point here is that the women have each smoked the loco weed in the innocent belief that they were smoking cigarets to quiet their nerves in a moment of stress over the finances of their club. The authors would have you believe that, although reefers have no more effect upon members of a jive band than that which you suspect when they get hot in a jam session, they induce in an elderly schoolmarm a belief that she can crawl into a water-cooler and cause a sheriff's wife to mistake a sprinkling can for a teapot and the fedora of a president of the Chamber of Commerce for a cup.

Clinically and farcically this episode is the high point of Sweet Charity and it was a tough trudge for the actors to reach that point, in spite of the loud and anguished shouts of encouragement on the part of Philip Loeb. The first intermission was one of the greatest reliefs I ever experienced in the theater. The beginning of the second act seemed as though the wait for the second intermission was going to be really excruciating. But as soon as one of the ladies reached for a package of reefers that had been left behind by a cloud-walking hot trumpeter, you knew the fireworks were about to begin. And you were not let down. You were simply picked up and dropped.

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Follows Familiar Mechanism

For the rest, Sweet Charity follows the familiar mechanism of farce, the mechanism that has made All's Well That Ends Well and Charley's Aunt enduring classics and such terrific bores. People running around; mistaken identity; the false benefactor; the whipped-up suspense; innocent victims of the plot locked up in jails or in a cellar; and the straightening out of everything at the last moment.

The Friendly Hand is a club operated by the ladies of a Connecticut town for social and charitable purposes. Their pet project is a day nursery for the children of mothers who are engaged during the day as munitions workers. They have engaged the King of Swing and have sold 2700 tickets for the night he and his band are to play; but their funds are attached by one of the objects of their charity who slipped on the floor of the clubhouse when he was dragged in to take an extra Christmas basket, broke his leg, brought suit and was awarded $5000. The plot is concerned with the ladies' desperate efforts to extricate themselves from this predicament and with their equally desperate effort to hold the dance and get the King of Swing. They kite a check, engage in various feather-brained swindles and emerge victorious, but through no conscious effort of their own.

The lines are broad, crude and obvious—of the kind that were known as sure-fire back in old days of burlesque, from which, indeed, many of the lines seem to have come. Toward the end of the second act, the tempo is accentuated into that sort of frenzy which sometimes characterizes a George Abbott production when Mr. Abbott hasn't anything to work with and hopes that if he can get the actors moving and speaking fast enough nobody will notice it. Enid Markey, in her best nitwit manner; Philip Loeb, who looked and acted more like an insane professor than a booking agent, and Harlan Briggs did their very best to squeeze some juice out of the dried apple, and they succeeded now and then in provoking some loud belly-laughs from an amiable and indulgent contingent of the audience. Others in the cast did rather guiltily what they were called upon to do. The audience paid tribute to their gallant struggle at the final curtain by applause that was like a hail and farewell.

"Sweet Charity"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
December 29, 1942

Charity Should Stay at Home

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

CONSIDERING what Helen Hokinson can do with clubwomen in a single drawing, playwrights who take them on for three whole acts do so at their own peril. I say this with the more assurance while still fresh from *Sweet Charity*, a farce partly at the girls' expense, but mostly, I am afraid, at the authors'. If a little of *Sweet Charity* is fun, a lot of it is silly, and a lot more is just nothing at all.

Compared to the Hokinson ladies, last night's contingent is a little on the raffish and harem-scarem side, as you might guess merely from the fact that George Abbott is involved. Or, at any rate, they get that way as soon as the wheels of farce begin to turn. Having sold scads of tickets for a charity dance at which the nation's mightiest swing band is to play, they suddenly lack the $2500 that the band leader demands strictly in advance.

* * *

Palpitant and panicky, the top ladies of the club start going off the deep end in order to keep faith with the ticket-holders. Theirs is the usual out-of-the-frying-pan fate of farce: from wheedling they are driven to lying, from lying to fraud, from fraud to forgery, and from forgery to blackmail. En route, they get tangled up in marijuana cigarets, which provides the most amusing scene in the play; and at length the dough is raised and the curtain is lowered.

There are some funny moments of a giggly kind in *Sweet Charity*, but the whole thing is just a battered old formula about a hopeless financial mess, applied for a change to clubwomen. And clubwomen bloom better in satire than in farce.

Mr. Abbott has directed with his usual lack of inhibitions, and there are nice performances by Enid Markey, Jane Seymour, Harlan Briggs, Mary Sargent, Viola Roache, Augusta Dabney, and, in particular, Philip Loeb.

'SWEET CHARITY'

A comedy in three acts by Irving Brecher and Manuel Seff; directed by George Abbott; setting by Cirker and Robbins; presented at the Mansfield Theater on December 28, 1942, by Alfred Bloomingdale. The cast:

Mrs. Pat Mitchell	Augusta Dabney
Mrs. Eva Ingersoll	Viola Roache
Nurse	Mildred Todd
Miss Beulah Ogilvie	Jane Seymour
Mrs. Laura Brindle	Enid Markey
Myron Mitchell	Whitner Bissell
Mrs. Diane Martindale	Mary Sargent
Jonathan Bates	Harlan Briggs
Sheriff Andrew Brindle	Calvin Thomas
Harry Trott	Philip Loeb
Photographer	Rollin Bauer
Trumpet Wilson	Dort Clark
Burton Sedgewick	John M. Kline
Mr. Hogarth	Leslie Litomy
Mr. Beasley	Hans Robert
Mr. Merritt	John Adair
John Dexter	John Kirk

The Family—with Liselotte Krumschmidt

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 29, 1942

Hophead Ladies

By HOWARD BARNES

IT IS possible that the authors of "Sweet Charity" were on the track of something big. With a nod to Helen Hokinson, they have charted the reactions of several fuddy-duddy ladies who accidentally take a few whiffs of marihuana. Not having seen staid clubwomen in this predicament, your reviewer was riveted to his seat during the second act of the new Mansfield offering. Let me assure you, though, that it was through embarrassment rather than clinical curiosity. For this Irving Brecher-Manuel Seff drama is no bargain, with or without reefers.

It is reasonable to suppose that the show was meant to be a rather venomous lampoon on those feminine welfare organizations which are equally bankrupt from a financial and moral standpoint. "Sweet Charity" pokes fun at women's clubs, sometimes with properly acidulous comment, but the subjects of the travesty come out way on top. On the whole this Alfred Bloomingdale presentation of "a George Abbott production" is as tasteless and uninspired a bit of dramatic diversion as has come to Broadway for quite a while.

The first act of the play is merely dreary. The members of the "Friendly Hand" club are dull; their plight, when their funds run out just before a big benefit, is scarcely the key to dramatic excitement or amusement. It still seemed possible last evening that Abbott, with his shrewd knowledge of stage craftsmanship, might contrive a merry burlesque out of the dramatic material. Instead of that he has settled for hop-head slapstick, with the principals of the alleged entertainment coked to the eyebrows. Give a cat a bowl of whisky and you will get the same burden of hilarity that you will find in "Sweet Charity."

* * *

The players deserve little more than commiseration. It is true that Philip Loeb turns in a scene or two of satiric bite that might have made a good play on a similar subject tolerable. Viola Roache caricatures the Hokinson caricatures rather effectively at times and Harlan Briggs does a blustering bit as the avaricious small town tycoon who pretends that he is helping the ladies out of their difficulties. No amount of acting could have made the sorry construction and writing of "Sweet Charity" stand up as satisfying showmanship. The season has hit a new low this New Year's week.

NEW YORK SUN
December 29, 1942

'Sweet Charity,' a So-so Farce, Opens at The Mansfield Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

ODD things happen rapidly in "Sweet Charity," a farce by Irving Brecher and Manuel Seff, which opened last evening at the Mansfield. Club women lose $2,500, innocently smoke "reefers" left in their path by a mad trumpeter, lock a representative of the FCC in a cellar and rob a real estate operator to build a baby home.

Philip Loeb is baffled and stares madly out over the audience for succor; Harlan Briggs alone is blandly comical in the uproar.

This all amounts to a two-alarm farce, being neither a smolder nor a five-alarm conflagration. It begins in tedium, rouses itself to intermittent hilarity in the second act and ends well enough. It is never quite as good as it ought to be. Even in its best moments it is apt to stumble badly; during its worst, it is plainly on hands and knees. But there is no denying that it has Mr. Loeb or that he is funny. It would also be foolish to argue against Mr. Briggs.

Mr. Loeb is the agent of a swing band, and all he wants to do is to collect a $2,500 fee and have the band come and play for the "Friendly Hand" club. But the club has had its money attached and can't pay. The club, which consists of such amusing people as Viola Roache, Jane Seymour and Enid Markey, tries to borrow the money and has it attached again; almost borrows it from the Chamber of Commerce but goes on a reefer jag and tries to climb into water coolers; and gets itself into other odd plights too numerous and implausible for this brief and logical column. Mr. Loeb is chagrined and manhandled and spends a night in jail. A marriage is almost broken up and Mr. Briggs impersonates a Government official.

Much of this would be funnier if the dialogue were funnier and some of it—the first act particularly—needs better direction than George Abbott has bothered to give it. Maybe he just decided the first act wasn't worth the trouble and maybe he was right.

Mr. Loeb makes all of his actions and most of his lines funny and Mr. Briggs is extremely droll. Miss Markey is, as usual, comical and Miss Seymour is something to remember as she walks across the stage on her knees. The others in the cast behave as they should, and with right good will and often enough they make you laugh. But there is always room for more laughter in "Sweet Charity." As farces go, it goes only by fits and starts.

NEW YORK POST
December 29, 1942

"Sweet Charity," a New Farce, Arrives at the Mansfield

By WILELLA WALDORF

"SWEET CHARITY" was tried out on the road earlier this season, found wanting and closed en route to Broadway. Certain of its backers, however, thought the play was actually better than it seemed, whereupon they tossed out the original production and engaged George Abbott, the old wizard of farce, to stage it all over again.

Enticingly labeled "A George Abbott Production," it opened last night at the Mansfield Theatre. But Mr. Abbott's magic touch seems to have deserted him in this emergency. "Sweet Charity" is a labored farce about a bevy of club women in financial difficulties that succeeds only in being tiresome. Probably the main trouble may be traced to the fact that in the past Mr. Abbott usually figured as co-author of the farces he directed. Here he has a play by a couple of other fellows set before him, and is unable to make much impression on it.

It left us with the same let-down feeling experienced last season when George S. Kaufman, another Broadway wizard, produced a dreary little piece entitled "Mr. Big," also written by a couple of other people.

The moral seems to be that while a clever stage director is a great asset, he must have something at least faintly resembling a good play to direct if the results are to be anything but depressing.

Reefer Smoking in a Women's Club

Last night was very depressing indeed. Nothing makes us sadder than the spectacle of a troupe of capable actors exhausting themselves in a vain effort to squeeze laughs out of lines that are not very funny.

"Sweet Charity" is packed with quips that must have delighted their two authors. Now and then as the ladies of the Friendly Hand Club frantically endeavored to raise $2,500 to bring King Cole and his band down for the big charity dance, we could imagine the Messrs. Brecher and Seff slapping each other on the back in an ecstasy of mirth. Unfortunately, on the stage, a great many of their fanciest efforts had a studied, hollow ring that rendered even such a knowing acter as Philip Loeb curiously ill at ease in his role—that of the band leader's manager.

The big scene in "Sweet Charity," which is supposed to send the audience into fits, comes at the end of the second act when three members of the club's executive board unwittingly smoke a pack of reefers belonging to a local jitterbug. A few puffs are sufficient to render the ladies completely dippy and their language and conduct are shocking in the extreme to the visiting delegation from the Chamber of Commerce.

Sympathy for the Cast

In addition to Mr. Loeb, other members of the cast who had our sympathy were Viola Roache, Jane Seymour, Enid Markey, Mary Sargent and Augusta Dabney as the club ladies, Harlan Briggs as a sympathetic old rascal in the neighborhood, Whit Bissell as a deserted husband and Dort Clark as a jive artist, adept at the weird language understood and spoken only in jitterbug circles.

Next time you're moved to stage a farce, Mr. Abbott, please write at least part of it yourself. It seems safer that way.

"Sweet Charity"

NEW YORK TIMES
December 29, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Sweet Charity"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

THE play called "Sweet Charity" that has been wandering the outskirts for a time finally put in an appearance last evening at the Mansfield. Produced by Alfred Bloomingdale, it also bears a slogan with the familiar device, "A George Abbott Production," which means that everything is in it, including gags and marijuana. A frail little tale to be out alone on so foul a night, it manages through about two-thirds of its length to be quite funny—as though Master Abbott had started at the end to put in laughs where they count, but hadn't had time to continue back to Act 1. But two-thirds of an amusing comedy is above par for the course of the Broadway season thus far revealed.

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What has come to be known as the Abbott Touch is there in good quantity, the Abbott Touch consisting of fast direction and the failure to shy away from all gags, great and small. Irving Brecher and Manuel Seff have supplied the jokes, and the director has built them into whole situations. There also is a man named Philip Loeb in the cast, an old colleague of Mr. Abbott and a comedian who has been too long in Chicago and elsewhere and away from the Broadway stage. Mr. Loeb is a great man, who here plays the part of the business manager for an orchestra leader, and in his fierce air of always expecting fraud he is the last word in the harassed melancholy of those who stand between the arts and their public.

The Messrs. Brecher and Seff are telling the story of a woman's club. The Friendly Hand, whose members are trying to raise money through the importation of King Cole, the orchestra leader, and his band. Their receipts are attached for reasons outside their control and in the ensuing struggles—it being further a George Abbott Production—some of the officers inadvertently smoke marijuana and try to climb into bottles; a man from the F. C. C. is locked up in the cellar and the agent for King Cole spends a night in jail. Possibly the authors and the director have supplied the play with only a series of caricatures rather than a collection of characters, but possibly that doesn't matter too much.

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Associated in the cast with Mr. Loeb are a number of people who can play this sort of thing broadly, with the flat side of the sword. Harlan Briggs is excellent as the man who sued the club because he broke his leg in the building, thus by suit attaching the receipts meant for King Cole. Viola Roache, Jane Seymour, Enid Markey and Mary Sargent are four-fifths of the officers of The Friendly Hand, and Augusta Dabney is the fifth fifth supplying the love interest, an interest that Mr. Abbott's direction cheerfully throws away as soon as possible. Calvin Thomas, Dort Clark, Whit Bissell and John M. Kline have other roles of reasonable importance, and the firm of Clirker & Robbins has designed a setting sufficiently strong to withstand the beating it must take.

"Proof Thro' the Night"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
Dec. 26, 1942

"Proof Thro' the Night" Is a Vivid Drama of Women in War

"Proof Thro' the Night," drama by Allan Kenward. Produced by Lee Shubert at the Morosco Theatre, New York, Dec. 25, 1942.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

"PROOF THRO' THE NIGHT," presented at the Morosco Theatre last night, is the story of a dozen eager volunteer women who were deposited in a "converted gun emplacement adjacent to Bataan Peninsula early in 1942." They move in, suffer the adventures of the bombed and defeated American army, and accept their fate heroically.

This is the play that has been causing considerable excitement in Hollywood the last several weeks. "Cry Havoc" was its original title and it is already on its way to a picture production, having been bought by the Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer company, for which Allan Kenward, the author, writes movie shorts and probably sits in on many story conferences.

It is vivid drama, despite its being definitely synthetic in conception and building. Trained as we have been to the efficiencies and conditioning of the WAAC's and the WAVE's, not to mention the Red Cross nurses' division, it isn't easy to believe that this interesting, but none too capable, group would have been shipped into the front line at Bataan and left in a vulnerable dugout to work out its own salvation early in 1942.

Author's Imagination

If Author Kenward answers that neither WAAC's nor WAVES were active at the time, and that MacArthur was forced to take what he could get in the way of nurses' aid, the answer is still that the situation doesn't convincingly make sense.

"Proof Thro' the Night" is good theatre. Its all-woman cast is an effective novelty and extremely capable. But I, at least, have a feeling that Mr. Kenward overshot his mark when he depended upon novelty and theatrical effectiveness rather than upon a simpler and more plausible setup. A husky sergeant or two—or even a captain—would have added much.

That is quibbling of a sort. Last night's audience of refugees from a quiet and lightly depressing holiday was certainly held to complete attention, both by the Kenward story and the acting that gave it theatrical life.

The nurses moved in, were assigned their bunks, went on duty when ordered, and returned from their adventures pretty thoroughly mussed up. No one ever heard of what their duties really consisted.

In the old dugout they had their moments of a natural and dramatic hysteria, and worked up an interesting spy hunt when one bold young woman refused to tell the truth and nothing but the truth as to her activities.

Dramatic Bits

A pregnant native woman was brought in and delivered of a little Filipino, which caused one ripple of excitement. One of the volunteers was forced to spend days and nights in a fox hole with dead soldiers and suffered a mental lapse in consequence.

One girl, definitely on the suspicious side for no better reason than that of creating a scene, accused another of questionable moral tendencies, and there were minor bits of drama that flared and died naturally, but without much help to the play.

Working with slight material Katherine Emery and Katherine Locke were able to create interesting characterizations. Ann Shoemaker barged in frequently to assert her authority and barged out again.

Thelma Schnee, the saucy one who stimulated the spy hunt; Florence Rice, Muriel Hutchinson; Florence MacMichael, Margaret Phillips, Helen Trenholme, Carol Channing, Julie Stevens, Ruth Conley—they all were well in character and helpful.

Albert Johnson did the setting, which is solid and real, and Moe Hack added atmosphere with the lighting.

NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN
Dec. 26, 1942

'Proof Thro' the Night' Describes Adventures Of Nurses on Bataan

By JOHN ANDERSON

IF WAR plays always were as heroic as the people and the deeds they celebrate the stage in war time would be one long sweet story but the trick isn't as easy as it looks. In "Proof Thro' the Night," Allan R. Kenward has tried to give us an honest picture of the valiant women who attended wounded Americans on Bataan during the grim retreat to Corregidor, and though Lee Shubert has given his play, which opened last night at the Morosco, every advantage of casting and production, it doesn't measure up to its subject.

Mr. Kenward's story of some nurses on Bataan has come east, after production on the Coast, on a wave of enthusiasm, and heard itself hailed as a female "Journey's End." The description is easy and superficially accurate since the pattern is reversed but similar. The cast is composed entirely of women; we see the characters in a sort of dug-out, subjected to gunfire, and we watch the individual characters emerge in a sort of collective reaction to war.

There is the strong-minded doctor, efficient and untroubled. There is her assistant, restrained and poised, and there are the volunteer nurses—a vacuous Southern girl, who might as well be in the Civil War for all the author thinks of her, a swaggering bully, a couple of timid aesthetes, who believe the was is a religious war, an ex-burlesque girl, a big strapping gal from a lumber camp, with an honest confusion about suggested sex perversion, and the inevitable spy.

They get on one another's nerves, help a native woman through the birth of her child in the midst of a bombardment, arrest the wrong person as the spy helping the Japanese, and finally confront the real traitor. At the end they find that they are rescued from their buried dug-out by the enemy only to face the firing squad.

Unfortunately Mr. Kenward's talents as a dramatic author are not up to his subject matter. A heavily Girl Scout, almost Vassar Daisy Chain atmosphere settles over the proceedings, so that his characters seem less like people than stencils, hollow, expected and pre-arranged. The little quarrels and misunderstandings suggest that the girls are powder impressions (not gun but puff) instead of human beings—and the Nazi spy business verges solemnly on the burlesque.

Mr. Kenward has directed the play himself, and Mr. Shubert has certainly not stinted himself on the cast. Ann Shoemaker sketches a lady doctor, one of the true-sounding characters, and Katherine Emery is excellent as her assistant. Thelma Schnee provides a vivid picture of a theatrically drawn and highly belligerent nurse, and Katherine Locke does what she can to redeem the part of a villain so villainously written that she might as well have had curling black moustachios and been done with it.

Carol Channing, in spite of some stagy direction, manages to give the hulking, confused Steve some real humanity, and Florence MacMichael suggests easily the fairest daughter of the Southland all in good clean fun. There are good performances by Helen Trenholme, Muriel Hutchison and Florence Rice and Mr. Johnson has devised an admirable setting of a beleagured dormitory.

It is Mr. Kenward's fault that it seems nearer a pillow fight than Bataan.

The play, incidentally, used be called by the much better title, "Cry Havoc." I do not know why the change was made unless for the Kennel set implication about "the dogs of war."

"Proof Thro' the Night"

NEW YORK SUN
Dec. 26, 1942

'Proof Thro' the Night,' War Drama, Is Offered at the Morosco

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

ALLAN R. KENWARD has collected most of the ingredients for stirring drama in "Proof Thro' the Night," which was excellently played last evening at the Morosco. The situation is there and the people; now and then there is grainy humor and at the end there is sudden, bleak tragedy met with courage. All that Mr. Kenward lacks is a story which would pull these ingredients together and make a play out of what is now only a descriptive study.

Mr. Kenward is writing of, and celebrating, the nurses on Bataan. His characters, all women, are the members of a small detachment, hazardously running a dressing station under a rain of bombs. They are varied women—a tough little waitress, a former show girl, a girl from a Montana farm, a girl who brightens every time she hears the word "man," a girl who feels the war to be a holy crusade and a girl with her knitting from the Deep South. There are all sorts of girls; plenty to make an act interesting by their mere introduction.

Mr. Kenward makes this good start, and the first act of "Proof Thro' the Night" is pungent and arresting. But the next step in drama is where the author begins to stumble. He cannot bring his attention to bear on any of these women, or on a situation—beyond the basic situation of their common peril—which will unite all of them. In brief, he can think of no story to tell about them, and so he must fall back on incidents. One of the girls is buried four days in a caved-in trench and loses her mind. Another gets shrapnel in her leg and another worries about her sex life. There is vague talk about a lieutenant who attracts several of the girls, and rather vaguer talk about a spy who may be among them. And the second act slowly dissipates the interest which the first has aroused.

Almost in desperation, Mr. Kenward turns to spy melodrama finally, making the least likely of the nurses—and certainly the least probable—into an enemy agent. This is rather ordinary melodrama, by no means of the first grade. It is plot for the sake of plot. It also has rather the effect of an afterthought. The final tragedy is entirely arbitrary, the outgrowth merely of an author's understandable desire to end his drama with a bang. Nothing becomes "Proof Thro' the Night" like its first act.

'PROOF THRO' THE NIGHT.'

A play in three acts, by Allan R. Kenward; staged by the author; setting by Albert Johnson; presented at the Morosco Theater on December 25, 1942, by Lee Shubert. The cast:

Doc	Ann Shoemaker
Smitty	Katherine Emery
Flo	Florence Rice
Pat	Thelma Schnee
Connie	Katherine Locke
Steve	Carol Channing
Sue	Margaret Phillips
Andra	Helen Trenholme
Nydia	Florence MacMichael
Helen	Julie Stevens
Grace	Muriel Hutchison
Sadie	Ruth Conley
Native Woman	Teresa Teves

The cast makes the most of all that is good in the play, and much is good. Katherine Emery, Florence Rice, Thelma Schnee, Helen Trenholme, Muriel Hutchison—all of these give sharp, intelligent portraits of Mr. Kenward's characters, in some instances defining what he has only suggested. Florence MacMichael is very amusing throughout; Carol Channing plays beautifully in one tenderly written scene. Katherine Locke struggles courageously in a thankless role, but is finally the victim of her author's clumsy plot. Albert Johnson has designed an effective setting; Mr. Kenward's direction is intelligent. But someone should have told Mr. Kenward that plays are supposed to tell stories.

NEW YORK POST
Dec. 26, 1942

"Proof Thro' the Night" Produced at the Morosco

By WILELLA WALDORF

"CRY HAVOC," the widely heralded play about women under fire at Bataan that originated on the West Coast, was produced on Broadway last night at the Morosco Theatre under a new title, "Proof Thro' the Night." The reason for the change, we understand, is the imminent release of a movie version called "Cry Havoc," and possible confusion therefrom. "Proof Thro' the Night," of course, is a quotation from the Star Spangled Banner, but it's not a very good play title. "Cry Havoc" is good enough to hang on to, it seems to us, even if the movie should turn out to have an all-star cast including Garbo, Dietrich and most of Hollywood's sexiest sweater girls.

The best thing about "Cry Havoc"—pardon, "Proof Thro' the Night"—is the fact that it can hardly help reminding all of us back here that the so-called sacrifices we are making to win this war are puny indeed compared to what those in the front lines have gone through, and are going through, every day.

The play dramatizes the last stand of twelve women in a dug-out on the Bataan Peninsula early in 1942. Four of them are "regulars"—a doctor, two nurses and a cook. The other eight are girls from various parts of the United States who went out to the Philippines as volunteers to roll bandages and operate switchboards. When things get tough, they are brought to the front to act as hospital aides and stretcher bearers.

American Girls at Bataan

Telling the story of Bataan in these terms is a tall order for any playwright, and Mr. Kenward is forced to drag in a good many old stencils to keep his drama from dying of monotony. Air raids, as has been amply demonstrated on Broadway in recent months, have a strange monotony of their own in the theatre, and the tragedy of Bataan is so recent, so painful and so overwhelming that it is not easy to relive it in a play that inevitably sounds at times like a gab fest in the dormitory of a girls' boarding school.

All of the familiar types are present—the nobly efficient, the toughie, the comic nit-wit from the South, the man chaser, the Lesbian, the mother's girl, etc. But despite the fact that the first two acts are enlivened by a good deal of off-stage carnage, sundry air raids and the birth of a baby to a native woman, it is not until the third act arrives that "Cry Havoc"—that is to say, "Proof Thro' the Night"—begins to set the nerves atingling as it should.

The fall of Bataan is an impressive subject, but Mr. Kenward is obliged to introduce a spy-in-our-midst sequence to give his play its biggest dramatic punch. In the last act one of the volunteers, revealed as an Axis sympathiser who has been passing information to the Japs, pulls a gun on her fellow workers and cold-bloodedly kills the first one who won't take her seriously. When a shell outside traps them all in the dug-out, she is forced to go on holding the gun.

All-Feminine Company

The ending of the play is horrible in the extreme, and although it may be authentic enough, it has about it a faint odor of the old "Beast of Berlin" propaganda stuff that makes it seem just a bit stagey, although Mr. Kenward is probably to be congratulated on not pulling his punches at this point and having everybody rescued at the last minute by the Marines.

The all-feminine company at the Morosco does a first-rate job under the author's direction. Katherine Emery, Katherine Locke, Thelma Schnee, Carol Channing and the rest are to be commended, as is Florence MacMichael, whose piping little voice makes every line she speaks a laugh-line. She is the comic relief girl from beginning to end. The production, too, is excellent, Albert Johnson's set and Moe Hack's lighting effects going a long way toward creating the necessary front-line atmosphere.

But "Proof Thro' the Night" says what it has to say most effectively when the Axis spy is taunting her fellow-volunteers with talk of their "inferior race" and "musical comedy army." One of the girls indignantly shouts back: "What do you think's going on back home right now?"

And the spy replies: "Strikes and political obstructionism and soft living"—or words to that effect.

Mr. Kenward's play was worth doing if only to help pound home that message.

NEW YORK TIMES
Dec. 26, 1942

THE PLAY IN REVIEW

"Proof Thro' the Night"

By LEWIS NICHOLS

LAST September a play called "Cry Havoc" opened on the West Coast, and the tidings rushing back said that it was one of the best war plays to date. Last evening Lee Shubert offered it at the Morosco under the name of "Proof Thro' the Night" and it became pretty clear that the coasts do not always see eye to eye on these matters. For Allan R. Kenward's play about a group of volunteer nurses in the dying days of Bataan is shrill and hysterical. It mingles what should be a moving study of human nature under stress with plain old-fashioned spy melodrama, and it finally ends with some set speeches about democracy which under the circumstances might have been implied.

Having faith in his play, Mr. Shubert has given it every advantage. For the all-feminine cast he has assembled a group of excellent actresses, and Albert Johnson has designed a setting that is admirable. But while "Proof Thro' the Night" has taken its theme from one of the truly inspiring moments of the war, it has been only brushed by that inspiration and not captured by it. Mr. Kenward's collection of nurses are not clearly defined as individuals, and as they go about their tasks the strings, as well as the anxious eye of the puppeteer, can be seen hovering over them.

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The scene is a converted gun emplacement; the characters, with two exceptions, are volunteers. On their arrival they regard nursing in the Philippines as something of a lark, but when the reinforcements do not come and bombs begin to fall they are thrown into a situation they did not expect. Their characters change under the strain; some grow morbid, some petty. Had Mr. Kenward stuck to his central theme, and had worked it over more, he might have written something on the general order of "Journey's End," but he did not. One of the nurses is a spy, trained by the bund, and the efforts to find her out destroy a different mood with melodrama.

Thelma Schnee has one of the leading roles, an arrogant and tough young lady who quarrels with the head nurse but makes up with her, of course, at the end. She is excellent. Katherine Emery also gives a good performance as the head nurse, and Florence Rice, back from the screen, is admirable in one of the other roles. Katherine Locke encounters one of the less carefully written parts and others present include Helen Trenholme, Julie Stevens, Ann Shoemaker—this latter good as a doctor—and Carol Channing. Mr. Kenward directed.

"Proof Thro' the Night"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
Dec. 26, 1942

Heroines of Bataan Honored at Morosco

By BURTON RASCOE

ALLAN R. KENWARD'S Proof Thro' the Night, which was presented by Lee Shubert at the Morosco last night, is a timely and thrilling tribute to the nurses and women auxiliary volunteers who served through the hell of Bataan and Corregidor. I liked it far better than I liked The Eve of St. Mark, finding in it not only more positive values in bringing the realities of the war home to us than in the Anderson play but also more of substance, not only better theater but better drama.

At first this will seem curious to you when I tell you that the play, although it is entirely about women and played by an all-woman cast, is reminiscent of nearly every war play you ever saw. The scene and the funk incident remind you of Journey's End; the ribald realism of one or two situations reminds you of What Price Glory? the scene where the girls elect to stay on, when they have a chance to be safely evacuated, reminds you of a very similar scene in The Eve of St. Mark; there are many touches that remind you of war plays you have already seen in the movies, and there is one gag-line and bit of business that recalls not a war play, but a famous gag-line in The Front Page.

What, then, you may ask, has this play got that, for instance, The Eve of St. Mark hasn't got? Well, for one thing, it has 12 individual women in it, each with distinct and very real personalities; they are not stock types. They are girls just like the ones you know in the office or among your acquaintances, or perhaps even in your own home; they are not poetic embodiments of patriotic sentiments. You love every one of these girls, except the one who proves to be a villainness and a spy, and you suspect and don't believe in her existence from the first. You love them, you pity them, you admire them and you cherish them—and you are troubled deeply about what may be happening to girls like them in situations suddenly as desperate as those children found themselves in when the bells tolled for Bataan and Corregidor.

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Main Plot Unconvincing

Mr. Kenward's contribution, in the midst of what appear to be so many borrowings from previous hits, is in his highly successful differentiations in the personalities of the women who make up the little band of helpers on Bataan, and in this, I suspect, he owes much to the fact that, under his direction, he has found 12 young women and one older woman who have the talent and intelligence to feel and project their parts with complete convincingness. . . . In fact the incidental drama is so real, beautiful and touching that you rather wish that Mr. Kenward had dispensed with the main plot, which is so far fetched and melodramatic that it does not carry conviction. It seems to provide the action for the third act, but actually it is not needed for climactic force. For what could be more terribly dramatic than the final capture and annihilation of 10 girls, who only a few months before had joined up as telephone operators and general utility helpers more with the idea of going places and meeting men than with any idea of what they were getting into? There was no need for a female spy among them, spouting Nazi propaganda swill, to make them tragic and heroic figures. . . . But as long as the spy is in the play, I guess she can't be taken out, and even with that sop to the thrill-minded, the play has force and beauty.

The entire action takes place in an underground emergency hospital and quarters for nurses on Bataan. Three veterans, one a woman doctor (Ann Shoemaker), two nurses (Katherine Emery and Florence Rice) and a cook (Ruth Conley) are joined by a group of chuckle-headed, inexperienced girls who have been converted into an emergency nursing outfit although they have volunteered for clerical work.

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War Is Brought Home

Here they soon find out that war is not like a dance at a training camp canteen. They are placed under the command of an efficient but beautiful martinet (Miss Emery), who makes it abundantly clear that their work is serious. Pat, a slangy, hard-boiled former waitress (Thelma Schnee), develops an envious hatred for Miss Emery on sight, and a former burlesque girl also has her knife out for Miss Emery because of what she supposes to be their rivalry for the same Don Juan of a lieutenant. Others in the outfit are two sisters who have been sheltered all their lives, and one of whom loses her mind after being buried in a shell hole for three days with dead bodies; a Southern girl who is hardly aware there is a war going on; a pathetic girl (Carol Channing) who doesn't know she is abnormal until the cause of her tenderness and solicitude is brutally hurled at her by Miss Locke in a later regretted outburst of hysteria, and a very feminine female who is always getting out of hard jobs on pleas of fatigue.

A drama of conflicting temperaments and rivalries is played out for two acts marvelously with gusto, humor, realism and pathos all movingly intermingled. Then melodrama develops. Pat is falsely accused of being a spy and locked up. The shirker turns out to be a Nazi with a gun, who fires two bullets, killing Steve when she comes too close to her and holds the others at bay. As the spy is about to make her way out a bombardment buries them under. Then, as Miss Emery realizes, the spy is doomed for she has only three bullets, and the other girls sleep in rotation, while the spy cannot. When the earth is removed from the cellar door the Japs are in possession. The spy runs out but is shot down. The others are told to come out or be blown up. All but two leave. Machine guns mow them down. The two that are left with a baby that has been born to a native woman leave the baby and go out to their death.

Miss Emery, Florence MacMichael, Miss Schnee, Miss Locke and Miss Rice bore the greatest share of the dialogue, but the entire cast was good. Miss MacMichael warmed the hearts of everybody and almost stole the show because she was as endearingly dumb, angular and amusing as Lynn Fontanne was when she made her great hit in a small part in a pair of petticoats—a part that caused Dulcy to be written for her.

Apart from the melodrama, this a human tragedy that is terribly touching and real.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
Dec. 26, 1942

Female 'Journey's End'

By HOWARD BARNES

ANY play that cited the courage of American nurses in Bataan during that terrible defeat would be bound to have strong dramatic and emotional implications. Allan R. Kenward's "Proof Thro' the Night," which opened at the Morosco last evening, plays them for all it is worth. This newest of the war dramas has a competent all-feminine cast, an all-out script and a fair to middling production. If it had only been less obvious in its exploitation of a martial theme, it might have proved the stirring drama one anticipated after a recent west coast try-out. As it stands, it is only intermittently satisfying.

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There are fine eloquent moments in the offering. The simple, honest touches which describe the reactions of various volunteer nurses, when they find that front-line fighting is no holiday, are sometimes penetrating and moving. The melodramatic whiplash which sets the stage for the climax is comparatively effective. The catch is that the work as a whole is manufactured where it should have been burningly sincere. Even the occasional fine acting with which it has been blessed does not keep a very hollow note out of a tragedy which should have had tremendous substance and feeling.

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The author has been better in picking characters than he has in placing them in convincing circumstances. The Florence Nightgales of "Proof Thro' the Night," constitute an interesting bunch of women, caught up in a desperate rear-guard action and facing ultimate annihilation. There are a former hash-slinger, a famous surgeon, a burlesque stripper, a drawling Southern gal and a junior leaguer. There is also a spy, who helps the Japs to take a converted gun emplacement and spells her own doom in so doing. Each time that one of them starts to come alive and take on true dimensions, the plays gets tangled up in tricky and rather fraudulent variations on the main theme.

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Sentiment is easy to evoke with subject matter such as this. It should be handled with more delicacy and dignity than it is in "Proof Thro' the Night." The climax itself, in which the surviving nurses are taken out and machine-gunned by the enemy, is too contrived for comfort. The players are rarely responsible. Katherine Emery gives a straight and convincing portrayal of a deputy head nurse living on benzedrine; Ann Shoemaker is fine as the jovial head of a mobile unit and Florence Rice, Florence MacMichael and the other actresses, contribute what they can of variety and color to the proceedings. The proceedings themselves are wanting in heft. War plays are easy to conceive, but not easy to execute these days. "Proof Thro' the Night" may have tried to celebrate something very splendid and close to our hearts, but it has not suceeded very triumphantly.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
December 27, 1942

A Cooked-Up Play About Bataan

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

WAR background or no war background, West Coast enthusiasm or no West Coast enthusiasm, *Proof Thro' the Night* is largely tripe. It is the product of a violently melodramatic mind which, having got hold of a serviceable theater idea, sweats the bejeezus out of it. Mr. Kenward has written about some volunteer nurses on Bataan, not with a deep feeling for their plight, but as though they were the theater's last chance to churn up excitement or whack the emotions. As a result, he has fired wildly in all directions and clean missed his target.

Doubtless Mr. Kenward intended a female counterpart of *Journey's End* and hoped to trace the results of all-out war and almost claustrophobic confinement on a group of girls who had no conception of what they were in for. But his play is as showy in expression as it is shrill in tone. His characters, for one thing, are too much rigged up for effect to have any chance of becoming real. One of them is a former burlesque queen, one is man-crazy, one is an incredibly sappy Southerner, one is an unconscious lesbian, one swallows benzedrine, one is a professional trouble-maker, one goes batty, and one turns out to be a Fifth Columnist. With such an aggregation, plenty would happen right in anybody's parlor. But with such an aggregation, it is impossible to do what is most worth doing in a play like this: show the effect of a highly abnormal life on generally normal people.

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Mr. Kenward, in fact, pretty much gives up trying to show anything after a while, and turns the play into, first, an old-fashioned mystery as to who is the spy on the premises and, next, an equally old-fashioned thriller of the spy holding the others at bay with a revolver. Revolver in hand, the Bundist delivers some scornful speeches about democracy, which are slapped down with some ringing rebuttals. Unfortunately, they seem all too made-to-order.

Proof Thro' the Night is not, like a number of other war plays, stifled in talk, but it holds your interest by such violent and elementary devices that it can't even be called good theater. It somehow turns heroism into hopped-up heroics, and makes Bataan seem even farther away than it is.

Under Mr. Kenward's uneven direction, a group of experienced actresses turn in rather unequal performances. The best work is done by Ann Shoemaker, Florence MacMichael, Muriel Hutchison, Katherine Emery and Carol Channing.

"The Three Sisters"

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 22, 1942

'The Three Sisters' Revived by Cornell and a Starry Cast

"The Three Sisters," drama by Anton Chekhov. Revived by Katharine Cornell at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, New York, Dec. 21, 1942.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

FIRST there was "The Doctor's Dilemma" with as fine a company as you would want to see, headed modestly by Katharine Cornell. Then there was "Candida," with an all-time perfect cast. And now, at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre, there is "The Three Sisters," again with the generous Katharine providing a troupe of players several degrees better than the average best.

This Cornell lady is not only reviving the theatre's modern classics. She is reviving the modern theatre itself. And more power to her, say I.

Her performance, and that of her present aids, is much the best of any we have seen since Stanislavsky and his Moscow Art Players gave the drama here 20 years ago.

We raved a lot about that production, you may recall. Partly because the Moscow players were startlingly gifted, but also, I suspected at the time, because, not being able to understand the Russian speech, we permitted our imaginations to trick us into believing there was more behind the whiskers and the simulated suffering than appeared in the text.

Fine Reading

Anyway, here is a fine reading of the Chekhov masterpiece of frustration. Here is the human loneliness that can be suffered and sustained by hemmed-in minds confined to a hemmed-in community brilliantly realized.

"The Three Sisters" is a fascinating study to those interested in solid character portrayals and the miseries of the neurotic sisterhood. I have always found it a bit difficult to take as drama, seeing that little drama is developed in its telling.

Being without conflict, and without appreciable contrasts, I find myself of a mind half way through the play to head a movement to raise the money and send the Prozorov girls to Moscow with single trip tickets and a prayer that they and their unhappy friends will henceforth stay out of my playgoing life.

The Prozorov dream of getting to Moscow from the garrison town in which they have lived and worried all their lives is a Chekhov symbol for the restless longing that afflicts unhappy humanity.

Olga is a teacher with a lost love for her work. Masha is married to a dull academician and miserably in love with a married colonel stationed in her town. Irina is out of love with all her marriageable prospects but willing to sacrifice everything for a chance at Moscow.

These are Russian characters, and Russian longings. Insofar as they are basically universal they have a certain appeal. But it is not, I am convinced, a sustained appeal for average playgoers. I would therefore slip in a kindly warning to those who might expect too much from this starry cast.

Happy Actors

First audience awards will go, I suspect, to Ruth Gordon and Edmund Gwenn in this exceptional cast. They have the best opportunities to stir interest. Miss Gordon is the snaky little Natasha who comes in as a sister-in-law and all but disrupts the melancholy household. Gwenn is a moody surgeon who turns to vodka and simple philosophy for escape. His vodka scene was particularly effective.

Tom Powers also carries a light note into the gloom, and lightens the scene momentarily as Masha's unhappy scholar. Alexander Knox gives an excellent performance as another depressed philosopher, with McKay Morris as a cynical foil, and Eric Dressler keeps nicely in character as a distressed brother.

The sturdy, holding Chekhovian performances, however, are given by Miss Cornell as the unhappy Masha grasping at her moment of love; Judith Anderson, as the family stalwart; Gertrude Musgrove as the pitifully disappointed Irina and Dennis King as the frustrated but hopeful colonel.

They each had the spotlight for a moment, and each made much of the opportunity. The setting is full and handsome, by Motley. The direction fluid and interesting by Guthrie McClintic.

'THE THREE SISTERS'

Anton Chekov's play arranged in three acts; English text by Alexander Kolranasky and Guthrie McClintic; staged by Mr. McClintic; settings and costumes by Motley; presented at the Barrymore Theatre on December 21, 1942, by Katharine Cornell. The cast:

Olga	Judith Anderson
Masha	Katharine Cornell
Irina	Gertrude Musgrove
A Maid	Patricia Calvert
Tuzenbach	Alexander Knox
Solyony	McKay Morris
Chebutykin	Edmund Gwenn
Anfisa	Alice Belmore Cliffe
Ferapont	Arthur Chatterton
An Orderly	Kirk Douglas
Vershinin	Dennis King
Andrey Prozorov	Eric Dressler
Kuligin	Tom Powers
Natasha	Ruth Gordon
Fedotik	Stanley Bell
Roddey	Tom McDermott
Another Lieutenant	Walter Craig
A Maid	Marie Paxton

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
December 22, 1942

Chekhov's Three Sisters Opens at the Barrymore

By BURTON RASCOE

KATHARINE CORNELL'S presentation of The Three Sisters by Anton Chekhov at the Ethel Barrymore last night was, without doubt, an artistic event in the history of the theater. Not even the Moscow Art Theater's presentations of it in New York in the early '20s, with Mme. Chekhov and Maria Ouspenskaya in the cast, was as brilliant and as satisfying an achievement. The cast was such as producers and directors must dream about, and the settings and costumes were so unobtrusively right that you were hardly aware that they were costumes and settings.

Yes, it is a play that many people will want to have seen (please mark the tense of the verb), if only for the sake of polite conversation, just as many people want to have seen Sir Thomas Beacham or Toscanini on the podium whether they have an ear for music or not. It is an experience that identifies you either with the carriage trade or with the serious students of the liberal arts—or with the yearners.

But there is such a thing as pertinence, even in the finest of stage performances, and never did a play seem more like a museum piece than The Three Sisters did last night. A very Aubusson carpet of a museum piece, to be sure, an antique gold-plated samovar, if you will, but a museum piece just the same. Thus does the mood of period inevitably affect the reception of any play given.

Lacks Meaning in Present-Day Strife

In those dear dead days of the '20s, how we hugged to our hearts the delicious pessimism of the Russians who were already becoming very old hat in Russia! Even in our years of happy innocence, prior to 1914, the Russian soul seemed full of grandeur to us when it was displayed in the art of Chekhov, Dostoievski, Sologub and Artzibashiev as doing nothing whatever but suffering and asking what is the meaning of life. . . . Now, with Russian women in the trenches and many of our American women in war work from factory to bomber ferrying, with Billy Mitchell's sister just returned from fighting with the Yugoslav guerrillas, The Three Sisters conceived by Chekhov, even though expertly played by Miss Cornell, Judith Anderson and Gertrude Musgrove, seem to be three completely uninteresting females whose aspirations are trivial and whose fate is unimportant.

The Three Sisters, even more than The Cherry Orchard, is a perfect example of that Oblomovism, or pessimistic apathy, that was so endlessly and realistically presented in Russian literature from the failure of the revolution of 1904 down to the revolution of 1918. That pessimistic apathy was, no doubt, characteristic of the Russian people above the peasant class, and particularly of the intelligentzia, at the time, and, in presenting the disintegrating effects of inaction and dry rot, Chekhov was indirectly issuing a challenge to the Russian people. But it is stale stuff now. It has no pertinence either in what we know of present day Russian life or of our own. Ours are troublesome or even desperate times, but the last thing anyone would think of is being apathetic about the work in hand.

As an indication of the changed mood of the Chekhov audience, of the three characters in the play last night who evoked the greatest response from the audience two were highly disagreeable persons. They were crazy, but at least was something positive about them, whereas the others were embodiments of the negative. The high point of the play was reached by McKay Morris, as an inarticulate, unsocial army captain with a great inferiority complex, who slowly and most silently worked himself up into a great outburst of dissent. His point was merely that there were two universities in Moscow, not one, but it became a matter of the highest importance to him, for it was one of the few things in the conversational world of the Prozorov household about which he had any information or opinion whatever, and when one of the Prozorovs was wrong on that his whole conception of Life was shattered. Later he killed the last hope of the Prozorovs in a duel. There was something positive about that.

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Ruth Gordon Wins Honors

The highest honors of the evening were carried away by Ruth Gordon as the vicious-sweet nymphomaniac sister-in-law of the will-less three. And the reason Miss Gordon carried away the honors was that at least there was something positive about the character she played. She ought to have been murdered when she first appeared on the scene. That she was not was wholly the fault of the tack of spine in the three Prozorov sisters and their brother, who married the moron. The four Prozorovs wanted to go to Moscow to live, for Moscow represented to them not merely escape from provincialism but life itself. When the brother married the moron their last hope was gone, because he took to gambling in the frustration of his ambition to be a scientist, which frustration resulted from his marriage. Soon all the family property was secretly mortgaged by him to pay his gambling debt. The three sisters had neither the energy nor the character to make their wishes come true. . . . The third player to draw vigorous applause was Edmund Gwenn as the doctor in the drunk scene.

Alexander Koiransky, in collaboration with Guthrie McClintic, has made a new translation of the play for this presentation, and Russians tell me that it is infinitely superior to previous translations, since, according to them, Chekhov has been particularly unfortunate in his translators. As to that I would not know, since I know no Russian (even though I studied it for a year in 1917), but, at all events, the comedy values of the play were fully realized last night. I don't remember that there were comedy values at all in any Chekhov I ever saw or read before. . . . The engagement of The Three Sisters is limited.

"The Three Sisters"

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
December 22, 1942

Chekhov Gives Broadway a Lift

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

ONE of the finest plays in the modern theater was revived last night with one of the most notable casts in living memory. I cannot myself recall when three actresses of the standing of Katharine Cornell, Judith Anderson and Ruth Gordon last appeared in one play together. I can only say that, on the whole, it was a happy occasion that does credit to Broadway and gives substance and flavor to Chekhov. Perhaps it falls short of all one hopes for. But for those who want something beyond stage gestures and stage platitudes, nothing else on Broadway has so much to give. One has only to see a good production of *The Three Sisters* to realize that Chekhov not only was a revolutionary playwright 40 years ago, but still is.

The Three Sisters is a fine play—as fine, I think, as *The Cherry Orchard*—but by no means an easy one to produce. It must be always effective, yet never too emphatic; always fluid, yet never without form. It must be warm, touching, evocative, without ceasing to be, in the profoundest sense, comic. It must bring a kind of mist to our eyes and yet endow us with almost maliciously keen eyesight. For Chekhov's tale of weak-willed leisure-class Russians—with their sighs and self-pities, their laments that antedate their losses, their choice, almost, of frustration as a career—must not drift along with its characters, must find the right tempo and the right tone. Perhaps the greatest danger lies in taking the whole thing too seriously; Chekhov can be as much wrecked by "soulfulness" as Chopin. A more obvious danger is that *The Three Sisters*—in which so little happens—will fail in the theater of dramatic effect.

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The greatest merit of the present production is that it avoids the sombre and the lachrymose. It treats this play of self-frustrated people who dream of Moscow and never get there as the comedy of temperament that it is. At times last night it was almost overplayed for satire. But on the whole the comedy, like the pathos, sprang out of the characters, and the play was acted (as it has never been in previous American productions) in the spirit I feel sure Chekhov intended.

And for more than half the evening Mr. McClintic gave the play real dramatic flow, making points without stressing them, maintaining interest without forcing it. There were warmth and charm in the early scenes, which properly created a series of pictures. There was something like the right nervous, softly jangled tension to the scene in Olga's bedroom. Only the last act, which Chekhov himself has made difficult with too many short and broken scenes, seemed to lack life, was at once too drifting and too draped.

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Mr. McClintic has worked out a new translation, which sounds on the whole very natural and is miles above the standard Constance Garnett word-fog. The all-star cast has carefully avoided an all-star effect, though the production is not quite subdued to a single style of acting. There is teamwork rather than integration. As the neurotic, self-dramatizing Masha, Miss Cornell has a slightly over-pitched role that suits her talents almost too well. Miss Anderson plays Olga with dignity and warmth, but a touch of stiffness. As the vulgar, predatory Natasha, Ruth Gordon comes down hard on the part, brilliantly striking the violent discord she is meant to. As Irina, Gertrude Musgrove is pleasant, but a trifle too tremulous.

As the old doctor, Edmund Gwenn gives an excellent virtuoso performance. As the young baron, Alexander Knox plays with a notable sense of style. Tom Powers gives a good account of himself as Masha's fatuous husband, and Dennis King a tolerable one as her lover. Eric Dressler is adequate as Andrey. McKay Morris seemed to me altogether too sinister as Capt. Solyony.

Motley of London has mounted and costumed the play handsomely.

NEW YORK SUN
December 22, 1942

Chekov's 'The Three Sisters' Is Revived at the Barrymore Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

CHEKOV'S "The Three Sisters," that sad and subtle study of futility in yesterday's Russia, was revived last evening at the Barrymore—revived beautifully in a spacious production and with a cast which has been brilliantly selected and plays as superbly as any one could hope. Miss Katharine Cornell and Guthrie McClintic have spared no pains. Their revival is an evident labor of love and it rewards their devotion.

Miss Cornell herself plays Masha, the most desperate of the sisters who fretted their lives away in a little garrison town in the provinces and dreamed for months and years of going back to Moscow and never went. Judith Anderson is Olga, the eldest sister; Gertrude Musgrove plays the younger Irina, who was almost happy once for a moment or two before she also sank in the little backwater of tired intelligence which engulfed them all. Ruth Gordon is the strange and venomous Natasha, a ray of perverse vitality in the twilight of inadequacy. And in the supporting cast are such fine actors as Edmund Gwenn, Tom Powers, Alexander Knox and Dennis King. Through these and the rest, Anton Chekov's penetrating, misleadingly quiet, play is sharply realized.

"The Three Sisters" is, to some extent, an album of the past. Possibly never has the gulf between the Russia that was—the Russia of the directionless middle class, kindly and intelligent and essentially supine—and the Russia of today been deeper or more evident. It is easier than it was even a few years ago to grow impatient with Chekov's people; to feel that in them familiar human characteristics are given a special exaggeration which now and then makes them almost grotesque. Last evening's audience found, fairly enough, comedy where it was not originally intended.

But if the people seem to come from another world, they are still engrossing. It is the people who matter, of course. "The Three Sisters" is an affair of small plots, only casually dovetailed. It is the story of Masha who was married to a good-hearted pompous bore; of Olga who was tired of teaching school; of Irina who would have married a man she did not love if somebody had not killed him first; of a village fire and any number of failures by any number of people to get even small fractions of what they wanted. It is a miraculous, detailed and fascinating study of a dozen odd people, alike only in inadequacy and, for the most part, in good intentions. It is the story of a group of people who wanted symbolically to go to Moscow and never did. It is unhurried, deeply perceptive and, now more than ever, a kind of case history of a social class which died partly because it had nothing to do and bored itself to death.

It is not, of course, written for stars. Miss Cornell plays beautifully in a part no more important than almost any other. Miss Anderson is brilliant as the eldest sister, Miss Musgrove is gentle and understanding as the youngest; Miss Gordon's stylized, imaginative playing is cruelly revealing of one of the few characters for whom Chekov had little pity. Mr. Gwenn's acting of the role of the doctor who knew no medicine, and now and then got drunk when he remembered this, is superlatively good. Mr. Powers, Mr. Knox, McKay Morris, Eric Dressler, Mr. King—all these and all the rest are exceedingly good in a performance which Mr. McClintic has directed with great delicacy and Motley has handsomely designed.

If you wish to see "The Three Sisters" at its best, here it is. It is a long play and does not move rapidly, it may be a little yellowed around the edges. It is major drama.

NEW YORK TIMES
December 22, 1942

Miss Cornell and a Distinguished Company Revive Chekhov's 'The Three Sisters'

By LEWIS NICHOLS

AS SHE has done so often in the past, Katharine Cornell last evening added another distinguished production to her gallery as an actress-manager, and, what is perhaps more important, to the Broadway theatre of this Christmas week. She did so with a revival of Chekhov's "The Three Sisters," that saga of the defeated and the frustrated on a Main Street of Russia at the turn of the century. In it can be found some of the best acting of the year, for, as usual with Miss Cornell the manager, she has stinted on nothing and her cast comes from the top drawer of what would be any other manager's remote dream.

And it is as well, for "The Three Sisters," as viewed in these modern days, requires everything it can get from a cast. To Christmas week of 1942 the play seems a little remote. The descendants of Olga and Masha and Irina, writing another page in Russian history this morning, make the history of the static efforts of the sisters to return to Moscow appear a bit out of the present world. Miss Cornell's efforts, however, are quite of another order, and to the stage of the Barrymore she has brought what probably long will be referred to as the final word on this particular bit of Chekhov.

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Among these things list Ruth Gordon, who is wonderful. She has the role of Natasha, the country girl who becomes the sister-in-law. Coming coyly into the Prozorov family, she eventually is a vixen and a harriden, driving them off and at the end in violent control of their lives. Miss Gordon's range from a flouncing young girl just this side of comedy to a spirit so evil it curls the hair is magnificent. The gestures are there for the first part, and a piercing voice for the second. The Prozorov sisters did well not to trust her even at the start.

The sisters, themselves, are played by Judith Anderson, Miss Cornell and Gertrude Musgrove. Miss Anderson is Olga, the school teacher who hates it, the ultimate head of the school who also hates that. Miss Cornell is Masha, married to a teacher and dissatisfied, who has a love affair with a soldier who then is sent away. Miss Musgrove is the youngster; working in the telegraph office, she agrees to marry and then her fiance is killed in a duel. To their roles all three bring excellent descriptions of their various tragedies.

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There are also men. One of the rich roles of "The Three Sisters" is that of Chebutykin, the army doctor who is defeated down to loneliness and drink, and in this Miss Cornell offers Edmund Gwenn, giving an excellent performance. His version of the drunken scene probably is the most realistic since Disney was at work with the pink elephants; heads must ache all through the audience this morning. Mr. Gwenn can be kindly, cynical, sad; his role comes fully alive.

Dennis King is Vershinin, the battery commander who falls in love with Masha, and Eric Dressler is the brother Andrey. Tom Powers is excellent as Masha's husband, the high school teacher who wistfully tries to get along and is aware he doesn't amount to a great deal. Alexander Knox is the baron-fiance of Irina, who resigns his commission in the army in order "to work" and who simply says amid all the gloom that he is quite happy. There also are nice portraits of an old nurse, by Alice Belmore Cliffe and of an old man by Arthur Chatterton. As is usual in Miss Cornell's plays, Guthrie McClintic directed, expertly as usual.

"The Three Sisters"

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 22, 1942

Cornell and Chekov

By HOWARD BARNES

ONE of the classics of the modern theater was revived with impeccable artistry last night. Anton Chekov's "The Three Sisters," as it is presented by Katharine Cornell and her associates, constitutes a rare experience in playgoing. The tragedy of frustration, which the great Russian dramatist dedicated to a lost generation, could scarcely have found a more luminous and aware expression than it has had at the Ethel Barrymore Theater. If it proves only partially rewarding, it is because of the drama itself and not the fashion of its revival.

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From any standpoint of acting, direction or scenic investiture, "The Three Sisters" is a piece of dramatic interpretation which begs very little indeed. The middle class Russian provincials of the early nineteenth century, who were so bored with living that they wondered why they were alive, and then talked and talked about it, are given full dimension in this theatrical tapestry. Miss Cornell herself, with brilliant integrity, subjugates her performance to those of Judith Anderson, Ruth Gordon and Gertrude Musgrove. Guthrie McClintic has staged the work with reverent cunning and Motley has designed handsome period costumes.

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One still may wonder why the actress-manager saw fit to choose this particular play for a current revival. Granted that it has universal and enduring meaning; that its figures have recognizable significance in any period, and that it has passages of entrancing eloquence, it is still badly out of key with the tempo of the contemporary theater. That, I think, is because it is definitely a lesser work of Chekhov. Compared to "The Cherry Orchard" or "The Sea Gull," it is the second-rate creation of a fine artist. It would have been good to see Miss Cornell shower her largess on "The Cherry Orchard" rather than a minor classic.

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The fact is that "The Three Sisters," with its brooding contemplation of stifling boredom, has a tendency to communicate that boredom to an audience. The hysterical outbursts of the sisters, as they try desperately and unsuccessfully to work out a destiny which they can only realize as a return to the bright lights of Moscow, are true and sometimes moving. They lack the dynamic dramatic quality which would have made their several tragedies moving as well as disturbing. "The Cherry Orchard" is a genuine obituary of a class and period. "The Three Sisters" has only fugitive overtones of the essential theme.

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The acting does much to conceal the deficiencies of the subject matter. Even when the principals are merely sitting on the stage in an agony of inaction, they contrive to make their plight absorbing. Miss Cornell is beautifully assured as the most knowing and most tragically frustrated of the sisters. Miss Anderson is tremendously fine as the eldest girl who becomes a head mistress against her will and Miss Gordon is bouyantly vicious as the sister-in-law who takes delight in the proceedings.

Edmund Gwenn, meanwhile, is excellent as a bibulous doctor and McKay Morris, Alexander Knox, Tom Powers, Eric Dressler and Dennis King fill the male roles brilliantly. "The Three Sisters" is all that you may ever expect to find it. I believe, at the Ethel Barrymore. It is still somewhat wanting.

NEW YORK POST
December 22, 1942

Chekhov's "The Three Sisters" Revived by Katharine Cornell

By WILELLA WALDORF

KATHARINE CORNELL'S new production of "The Three Sisters," which opened what is described as a "limited" engagement last night at the Barrymore Theatre, conveys much of the luminous beauty, the bitterness and heart-break, the rueful comedy, of Chekhov's elusive but eternally fascinating drama.

Only a few years ago, in the George C. Tyler era, the production would have been touted as an "all-star revival," and it is by no means certain that this is the best possible approach to a work that requires extreme simplicity and perfect ensemble playing if it is to cast a spell over its audience. All too frequently an "all-star revival" develops into a series of "big scenes" for the "stars," grand opera fashion, a far cry from the symphonic design of Chekhov.

Obviously it was up to the stage director last night to fuse these starry elements into some sort of pattern, without which Chekhov is apt to degenerate into a windy bore. Guthrie McClintic has succeeded in doing this remarkably well for the most part, for while it is inevitably distracting to encounter a number of popular and well-known actors in parts of less importance than they usually play, to have them pause for some minutes while the audience greets them with salvos of applause, and to endeavor to fit them into the provincial home of the Prosorovs in the Russia of 1900, the performance finally settles down and moves with admirable smoothness after a somewhat erratic beginning.

A Company of Stars

Individually the performances are intelligent and sometimes very moving. Miss Cornell, submerging herself in the by no means star part of the unhappy Masha, conveys the sombre beauty of the role, while Judith Anderson lends dignity and pathos to the play in her performance as Olga, the schoolmistress, and Gertrude Musgrove is uncommonly appealing as Irina, youngest of the three sisters. Miss Musgrove, in fact, more than holds her own in this galaxy of important performers.

Of the men, Edmund Gwenn is amiably effective as the doctor, and touching as well in his drunk scene (in Act 2 of this version, Act 3 of the original). Alexander Knox makes an attractive Baron, and Dennis King's Vershinin is almost always in the picture, with McKay Morris, Tom Powers and Eric Dressler wandering in and out to some purpose during the evening.

Ruth Gordon's Natasha — the obnoxious sister-in-law—bothered us during the first act, but later, when Miss Gordon discarded some of her more distracting mannerisms and plunged into the play, she managed to be vigorously impressive in several scenes.

There were times when Mr. McClintic, perhaps worrying unduly over the bitter and tragic theme of "The Three Sisters," seemed to be angling a bit too obviously for laughs, especially in his direction of Miss Gordon. Natasha, as time went on, became not so much a vulgar and unpleasant woman as a clown.

Miss Gordon, no mean comedienne on occasion, had only to wave an arm and the audience was in stitches. It was in times like these that our misgivings as to the "all-star revival" approach to Chekhov rose up again after being all but forgotten in some well directed ensemble playing.

"The Three Sisters" is a difficult and taxing play to perform, and the new production is in most respects a notable one. The backgrounds and costumes designed by Motley are perfectly suited to the mood and manner of the play, and the play itself, even moderately well done, is an experience that no lover of the theatre can afford to miss.

The text, arranged by Alexander Koiransky and Mr. McClintic, falls easily on the ear and does not call undue attention to itself either by using strange and involved "foreign" English, or in becoming elaborately literary and abstruse.

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
December 22, 1942

'The Three Sisters' Opens at Barrymore

By JOHN ANDERSON

THOUGH Chekhov's plays are never easy to do in the theatre, "The Three Sisters" is the most difficult of all, and Miss Cornell has added greatly to her stature as an actress-manager by giving us, at the Ethel Barrymore Theatre last night, a notable production of the Russian masterpiece with such players as Judith Anderson, Edmund Gwenn, Ruth Gordon, Dennis King, Tom Powers, McKay Morris and Gertrude Musgrove with her in the cast. Under Guthrie McClintic's direction, the production is a fascinating addition to the Broadway season—an event of rare quality and distinction.

To say that it is the best American production of the play I have ever seen is not saying much, because the others have been mostly indifferent, and to compare it with the memorable work of the Moscow Art Theatre is to weigh against it all the repertory craft, native understanding, author assistance and directorial brilliance that went into what many of the Russian players themselves considered their greatest production.

Tragic Comedy

It is easier and fairer to take it on Chekhov's own terms, and to measure the qualities of the production against the play itself and Chekhov's intent. His study of three sisters stuck away in a provincial town, whose lives are frustrated in a dream of going back to live in Moscow is a superb example of the tragic comedy Chekhov made peculiarly his own.

To express his meaning Chekhov perfected a method that makes what he says a vital part of the way he says it, suggestive rather than explicit, half-hidden, half surgically exposed.

The lives of his characters are wrecked by the illusions they create of themselves, the excuses and petty evasions they make to escape the reality of living. It is the tragedy of attrition we see in his plays, and Chekhov records it with a doctor's clinical detachment, with humorous understanding, and some pity and compassion behind a revolutionary scorn for befuddled and useless lives.

Chekhov never creates a character merely to make fun of it, but his sense of diagnosis is never far from his sense of humor. As doctor plus playwright, his aim is to show how life can be restored by living it.

Too often, both in translation and production, there is the notion that since Chekhov suggests his meaning, there is something obscure, difficult, solemn and inexpressible about it. The truth, of course, is exactly the reverse. If his plays are played simply, even gaily, then the tragedy emerges—and only then.

Aimless Lives

There are passages in Mr. McClintic's direction that succeed wonderfully in capturing this surface laughter and vivacity, with a sense of many aimless lives enmeshed in the small affairs of a small town, a big house with people coming and going and, behind it all, the heartbreak of idle yearning and deep insecurity.

The first and second acts, here compressed into one act, have much of the gaiety that is needed, and high color. The second, with its magnificent jangle of frayed nerves, is not quite so steady in its effect, and the last misses a great deal of the accumulated tension and consequently the emotional release.

Some of this uneven effect is due to the sluggish tempo of the movement, and the play has been cut (not too drastically) to make up the lost time. Though Mr. McClintic's direction is sound and vigorous, it does tend to treat the play a little solemnly, but

(Continued on following page)

"Flare Path"

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
December 24, 1942

'Flare Path' Opens At the Henry Miller

By JOHN ANDERSON

OF ARMS and the man Mr. Rattigan writes at Henry Miller's theatre, specifically the British air arm, in another play about aviators in love and war. It is called "Flare Path," after the flame flanked runway that leads fliers into the skies, and though it is presented by Gilbert Miller with his usual fastidious care, with some excellent players it is, I'm afraid, not very much of a play. Every word of it may be quite true, yet for all its well-jerked tears, it has the ring of simple fiction.

Mr. Rattigan is the same Terence Rattigan who gave us the insoucient comedy of "French Without Tears" a few seasons back, and this, his newest play, comes to us with the approval of its native London.

Marry in Haste

In it he tells the story of a flight lieutenant, Teddy Graham, whose young wife, an ex-actress married him in the emotional haste of the London blitz, and repented at leisure—repented particularly for a certain well-preserved movie star, an aging glamor boy who brings on the play's central situation by arriving at an English country hotel where Mrs. Graham is staying to be near her husband's flying field.

Mr. Star tells Mrs. Lieutenant that she must quit her gallant flier and go with him. She says she will break with Teddy, but just as she tries to tell her husband that she loves another, Lieutenant Teddy is ordered on a special bombing mission.

He takes his trusty gunner, Sergeant Miller, and, in another plane, Flying Officer Count so and so, a Polish gentleman trying to even his score with the Nazis. After a suitable off-stage interval of wifely waiting and quiet tension, the planes come back—all except one, and Mr. Rattigan writes his best scene when the movie star is obliged to translate from the French a letter left by the Polish flier for his wife in case he didn't get back.

Happy Ending

The incident leaves him so shaken that he decides he cannot break up Lieut. Graham's marriage, especially when Mrs. Graham finds how desperately her husband needs her, so the movie star goes away quietly, the Polish count, presumably dead, happily returns, and the whole cast drinks and sings merrily. Curtain.

Except the aviators none of the principal characters seem very real. The only honest feeling in the play is in the fliers when they cling instinctively and desperately to the insecurity of their private lives. The story of the love of the star and flier's wife has a hollow sound, as if they didn't believe it themselves, but had to get on with the plot. Unfortunately Mr. Margetson is unable to make the situation any more convincing than the lines are themselves. Perhaps another actor, perhaps Leslie Howard, could have contributed some interest to the play's small dilemma, but even so, I suspect the play would have seemed contrived and mechanical.

Love-lorn Lady

Nancy Kelly plays the love-lorn lady attractively, in spite of some clumsy writing in the scenes with Mr. Margetson, and Doris Patston suggests admirably the tear-strewn humors of a bar-maid married to the Polish count. Cynthia Latham is gauntly amusing as the proprietor of the inn, and Helena Pickard portrays the cockney gunner's wife with feeling and restraint. Alec Guinness, in his New York debut, presents the young flight lieutenant with simple and likable directness, and achieves a vivid impression in the scene of emotional crack-up. There is good work also by Gerald Savory, Bob White, Alexander Ivo and Reynolds Denniston, but somehow "Flare Path" doesn't quite reward them for their efforts.

Or me, either, for that matter.

NEW YORK SUN
December 24, 1942

'Flare Path,' a British Triangle, Opens at Henry Miller's Theater

By RICHARD LOCKRIDGE

TERENCE RATTIGAN'S "Flare Path," which opened last evening at Henry Miller's Theater, is a well-mannered little play about a pretty young woman who had to decide which of two men needed her most. Since one of her men flies for the R. A. F., opportunity arises for the off-stage droning of motors, thus relating the triangle drama to war. The relation is not close; "Flare Path" treats of heroism in its off hours.

The scene of Mr. Rattigan's play, which has been doing very nicely in London, is a small-town hotel in England, close to a bomber field. Patricia Graham is there, visiting her husband, Flight Lieutenant Graham (Teddy).

The Countess Skreczewinska (Doris), who was once a barmaid and is still a bit cockney but is very fine underneath, lives there with Flying Officer Count Skreczewinski, who speaks broken English. And Peter Kyle, a noted actor from Hollywood although British by birth, drops by to resume his old love affairs with Patricia (Pat).

Mr. Kyle needs Pat because he is getting too old to be a romantic leading man and isn't good enough to be a character actor and is rather tired of it all. But Lieutenant Graham needs Pat because he is really frightened stiff whenever he flies and needs somebody to cling to. Pat, who possibly had read Shaw's "Candida," goes to the man who needs her most.

Which of them that is, you may discover by going to "Flare Path," since Mr. Rattigan's secret will not be disclosed here. It is a tiny secret and "Flare Path," although nicely done, is essentially a tiny play. It is graceful enough, gently amusing at times, well-bred always. But is emotionally undersized. Mr. Rattigan cannot make what these people do seem of vital importance. It may be that the implications of war overshadow the problems of these small lovers. But even less hopelessly overmatched, Pat and Pete and Ted would hardly, I fear, be easy to worry about.

It is easier to worry about the Count, who cracks up in the last act and leaves a rather touching letter for his wife and eventually returns, only a little wet. Mr. Rattigan has made something of the Count, broken English and all. He and Miss Doris Patston have made a good deal of the Countess, Miss Patston by acting the part with honest intensity of emotion.

Nancy Kelly is graceful as Patricia, but not overwhelmingly convincing, and Arthur Margetson does not noticeably allow his emotions to become involved. Alec Guinness is persuasive as the neurotic pilot and there are amusing performances by Cynthia Latham, Gerald Savory, Alexander Ivo and Helena Pickard. But it's all pretty trivial.

NEW YORK NEWSPAPER "PM"
December 24, 1942

A Poor Tribute to the RAF

By LOUIS KRONENBERGER

ONE can, I hope, admire British courage in the war without accepting every British playwright's version of it. Mr. Rattigan's version, for example, strikes me as both tedious and tinny. Whatever personal sincerity has gone into this story of the RAF has been fatally offset by its dramatic phoniness. Whatever knowledge Mr. Rattigan—who is himself in the Air Force—has picked up from observation he has rendered meaningless with cliches. At the same time, *Flare Path* has no more vitality as theatre than it has as drama. The drone of the planes overhead is half drowned out by the drone of the talk down below.

Mr. Rattigan has laid his play in a small provincial hotel near an air field, and centered it in the lives of three flyers and their wives. Two of these couples chiefly add comedy and human interest to the proceedings. The third couple, plus a movie star with whom the wife is in love, provide the plot of the story and most of the point. For when, after being out on an all-night raid, the young husband returns with a bad case of jitters, the wife realizes that in war time duty must come before happiness.

No one can quarrel with this conclusion, or with much else that Mr. Rattigan has tried to show in *Flare Path*. But one must quarrel very firmly with his manner of showing it. It is not merely that his two lovers never create the slightest illusion of being in love; it is not even that the wife renounces love for duty with no sign of inward struggle or lingering regret; it is that the whole idea has been served up cold, with the three characters simply there to illustrate it, and all their words falling patly into place.

Mr. Rattigan handles his smaller fry—his English barmaid married to a titled Polish flyer, his Cockney gunner married to a mousy laundress—with more vivacity but little less speciousness. He equips everybody with quantities of British restraint, so that everyone's voice breaks or nerves tense strictly according to Hoyle. He also rounds out the play with a full course in RAF flying, and underscores his class distinctions with a blatant parade of Cockney. And he sees to it that his lost flyer returns in time for a gay and matey curtain.

The RAF deserves better. Perhaps the cast does too, though some of its members seem on the feeble side. Those who played character parts—Gerald Savory, Helena Pickard, Cynthia Latham—gave the best account of themselves. Margaret Webster has directed intelligently, but the play is too talky to have any spin.

'THE THREE SISTERS'
NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN

(Continued from preceding page)

it has done remarkably well in achieving a certain unity of performance.

Miss Cornell's own portrayal of Masha, the unhappily married sister who falls in love with an army officer, also married, is vividly realized, never thrust forward with stellar insistence, and in its two important passages, superbly projected with force and fine perception. As the calmer, more balanced Olga, Miss Anderson suggests an admirable contrast in the poise of the performance, and while Miss Musgrove missed, I thought, some of the deeper meaning of Irina, the youngest, she presents a touching portrayal. Miss Gordon seems miscast as Natasha, who was just a common wench, but she does a brilliant job.

Superb Portrait

Of the men, Edmund Gwenn is by far the best in a superbly wrought portrait of the old Army doctor, and while Chekhov expressly forbids doing the drunk scene in the second act as it is done here, it is effective by itself. Alexander Knox is excellent as Baron Tusenbach. Mr. King hits the more obvious points of Verahinin without really sounding out the character, and there are admirable sketches by Mr. Morris, Mr. Powers and Mr. Dressler.

The settings by Motley are both atmospheric and accessible, possibly too handsome for Chekhov's meaning, but effective.

Altogether Miss Cornell, with the wisdom and responsibility of the theatre's First Lady, has taken the trouble to give us one of the modern theatre's master-works, and a rare treat.

"Flare Path"

NEW YORK POST
December 24, 1942

"Flare Path" Introduces Alec Guinness to the Broadway Stage

By WILELLA WALDORF

WITHOUT indulging in elaborate heroics, Terence Rattigan has written a human and often very moving play about the Royal Air Force. "Flare Path" has been running in London for some time now, and last night Gilbert Miller produced it for New York at Henry Miller's Theatre, introducing Alec Guinness to the Broadway stage as a young Flight Lieutenant. Mr. Guinness's career abroad has been a notable one, and after seeing him in "Flare Path" it is easy to understand why. Blest with a winning personality, he is also a fine actor.

Although "Flare Path" is concerned with the RAF, it is laid entirely in the lounge of the Falcon Hotel, Milchester. An airdrome is nearby, and the wives of some of the fliers occasionally come down to visit. Flight Lieutenant Graham's wife, a London actress, has decided to leave him and return to the aging but celebrated Hollywood screen actor with whom she had lived for some time in the States, and deserted in a fit of pique. Before she has a chance to break the news to her husband, the actor follows her to the Falcon Hotel, and the lieutenant takes off on short notice to bomb the Rhineland.

When he comes back, at 5:30 in the morning, after a rough trip across the Channel, and confesses the terror that assails him on every one of his flights, she realizes that she cannot leave him. On the surface, Mr. Rattigan's plot is nothing more than a variation of the old triangle theme, but the characters are human, the background has a feeling of reality about it—the author is a Flight Lieutenant in the RAF himself—and Mr. Guinness's performance as Graham lends distinction to the entire play.

A Smooth Production

Margaret Webster has directed with a feeling for the finer qualities of the work, and Raymond Sovey's setting depicts a typical provincial English hotel with all the fixings.

The company in general is helpful. Arthur Margetson is convincing as the actor of English birth who has made a fortune in Hollywood and is beginning to wonder if he can keep the studios interested by sliding deftly from romantic into character parts. Doris Patston as an ex-bar-maid married to a Polish count in the RAF, manages some difficult scenes with touching simplicity, and there are good character portrayals by Gerald Savory, Alexander Ivo, Helena Pickard, Reynolds Denniston, Cynthia Latham and Bob White.

'FLARE PATH'

A play in three acts by Terence Rattigan; staged by Margaret Webster; setting by Raymond Sovey; presented at Henry Miller's Theatre on December 23, 1942, by Gilbert Miller. The cast:

Peter Kyle.....Arthur Margetson
Countess Skreczewinska (Doris).....Doris Patston
Mrs. Oakes.....Cynthia Latham
Sergeant Miller (Dusty)..Gerald Savory
Percy.....Bob White
Flying Officer Count Skreczewinski.....Alexander Ivo
Flight Lieutenant Graham (Teddy).....Alec Guinness
Patricia Graham.....Nancy Kelly
Mrs. Miller (Maudie).....Helena Pickard
Squadron-Leader Swanson.....Reynolds Denniston

Nancy Kelly, as the flier's actress-wife, unfortunately seemed artificial and too much inclined to pose for our taste. She never delved very far into her role and almost always struck a false note in a production otherwise notable for a warm human quality.

This is a serious flaw, rendering "Flare Path" by no means as effective as it might otherwise be. As it is, however, we found it genuinely interesting most of the time, and Mr. Guinness's performance something more than that.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 24, 1942

'Flare Path' Helps Out the RAF and the Theatre As Well

"Flare Path," drama by Terence Rattigan. Produced by Gilbert Miller at Henry Miller's Theatre, New York, Dec. 23, 1942.

★ ★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

TERENCE RATTIGAN, who wrote "Flare Path," the new war play at Henry Miller's theatre, doesn't see why a war play can't be a happy play as well. Happy, at least, in its general conclusions. Of course, in every war play there has to be some tragedy to support that verisimilitude that keeps the drama realistic and the theatre populated.

But beyond the tragedy there are the lives and adventures of the humans about whom tragedy circles. These, too, are worth considering.

So Terence, being a compassionate Irishman, permits his heroine to be sentimentally noble without making a fool of her, and in the end he lets Johnny come home from a crackup in a raid.

Johnny is purely incidental to the main story in "Flare Path," but he is a resurrected symbol of the old fashioned happy ending, and he helped materially in sending last night's audience home pleased and satisfied with its evening in the theatre.

There Is a Difference

I do not recall that this has happened with any other war play this season. Or last season.

"The Eve of St. Mark" ends on a note of heroic sacrifice. "The Wookey" died a-bombing. So did "Heart of a City." So did "Morning Star." So did "Yankee Point."

But in "Flare Path" we have the honest wives of honest fliers getting their men back. Which is a pleasant change, however theatrical.

The setting for the Rattigan drama (the author, incidentally, is himself a flier) is the lounge room of a country hotel near a flying field in England.

The wives of the fliers come down from London to visit them. Patricia Graham, a London actress who married Flight Lieutenant Graham during an emotional moment in the 1940 blitz, is one of the wives.

Patricia had had an actor lover who had gone to America and made a name in pictures. Now he is back and of a mind to reclaim Patricia.

Nancy Is Back

Patricia finds herself forced to choose between two men, both of whom need her, both of whom have excuse for the demands they make upon her. Author Rattigan manages to hold this common stage situation to a higher level of reasoning intelligence than many of his contemporaries have done.

The acting is worthy the play. Nancy Kelly, who left us four or five years ago, after scoring a marked success as Gertrude Lawrence's lovely daughter in "Susan and God," comes back from the coast all grown up, with a woman's hair-do and a heroine's progressive physical emotions.

She still remembers the lessons she learned from Miss Lawrence, and she could not have picked a safer or a more popular model.

She was sure of her scenes last night, and played them with good judgment and with technical skill.

From England

Opposite her is a young man from England, Alec Guinness, another graduate of that Old Vic repertory theatre that has sent us Maurice Evans, John Gielgud, Ralph Richardson and other gifted young English actors. His performance as the young flight lieutenant is as perfect as such characterizations can be.

Arthur Margetson and Doris Patston both score, and deserve to score, being two good actors who have had more than their share of short and easily forgotten roles.

Alexander Ivo plays the rescued Johnny, and does so with such earnestness and understanding as to help the play greatly.

There are also excellent bits by Helena Pickard, Cynthia Latham, Reynolds Denniston, Gerald Savory, and Bob White. A fine cast, and a solid and attractive setting by Raymond Sovey. Margaret Webster did the staging, and that helps, too. Only one obviously weak incident. She permits the lover to toss an incriminating letter on the public room floor and leave it there for anyone who might appear to pick it up and change the plot.

NEW YORK TIMES
December 24, 1942

'Flare Path,' About the R.A.F., Comes From London to Henry Miller's Theatre

By LEWIS NICHOLS

ANOTHER war play from London arrived on Broadway last evening when Gilbert Miller, who almost alone is keeping the transatlantic drama channels open, offered "Flare Path" at Henry Miller's Theatre. It would be agreeable to report that Mr. Miller in his latest attempt might meet with better success than before, for he has given Terence Rattigan's play an impeccable production, but the fact remains that as it reaches this side of the water the drama seems sentimental, slow and confused.

Quite possibly the fault lies over here, for New York has not yet seen a blitz, nor watched planes take off to bomb the Rhineland, nor heard German planes overhead. In London, where the play has been running since August, things are different, and "Flare Path" deals with a subject known to every one—just as "The Eve of St. Mark" deals with one known throughout America. As the play stands on a Broadway stage, it comes mainly down to the story of two men and a girl; and the extra types of English life that obviously have appealed to London are quite lost here.

• • •

Mr. Rattigan is dealing with the R. A. F., and as a matter of fact it was while on duty as a flying officer that he wrote it. His scene is a hotel near an airfield and his chief characters are a flight lieutenant, his wife, who is an actress, and the latter's former lover, a film star. As other characters, there are a gunner and a Polish flier, as well as their wives, and part of Mr. Rattigan's story tells of the women who are waiting while the planes are out over Germany. The most effective sections of "Flare Path" deal with that anxious wait; the least effective—and unfortunately they are in the majority—content themselves with the efforts of the star to win away the lieutenant's wife and her uncertain efforts to make up her mind.

• • •

Alec Guinness, who is making his debut on this side of the water, is the flight lieutenant, bringing a nervous energy and bounce to the part, but seeming realistic only part of the time. Nancy Kelly is the wife, and Arthur Margetson is the aging (forty-seven years) film star; and both appear at times a little unhappy, as though the characters they are playing really had met in a play in New York and wished they were there rather than in a hotel near an English air field.

It is in his minor characters that Mr. Rattigan is best, and those who play them do so well. One is Doris Patston, who has the role of a former barmaid now married to the Polish flier; she is excellent as she waits in the hotel while his plane is long overdue. Gerald Savory, who is a playwright as well as an actor, is the gunner, whose back constantly is knotted from the cold on each flight; and Helena Pickard plays the part of the gunner's wife, who has been bombed out of her London home and has just a day off from her job to come and see him. Margaret Webster directed "Flare Path" with her usual precision, and Raymond Sovey has designed an excellent set of the hotel room.

"Flare Path"

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
December 24, 1942

Flare Path; RAF Play Opens at Henry Miller's

By BURTON RASCOE

THE audience, except for a fashionable party of eight, was still and attentive last night throughout the first American presentation of Flare Path, by Terence Rattigan, at Henry Miller's Theater. You could have heard a program drop except when the members of the fashionable party were getting their seats after the second and third acts were well under way, having overstayed the intermissions at a nearby saloon. There was scarcely a cough in the house, in a season when coughs have been almost like a chorus at several shows.

This attention was a tribute to a tense and wholly satisfying drama, skillfully enacted by an excellent cast. I think the high quality of the play was a surprise generally. True the play is a smash hit in London, but that may or may not mean a thing; London audiences often like plays which fail when produced in this country and they do not always respond to hits from Broadway. Moreover Flare Path appeared unobtrusively. There was no fanfare. There was no all-star cast picked for it. Indeed there is no "big" name in the cast at all. And, besides, brief summaries of the substance did not promote any great expectations. They sounded as if the play were one of those things better left to second features in the movies.

* * *

A Play with Substance

How far wrong were such guesses! Gilbert Miller is to be thanked and congratulated for having given us a war play that has substance, beauty and truth; a perfectly believable, deeply moving play about the people, not a war poster—a play about men who are too busy doing dangerous, necessary jobs to think of heroism and who leave to the rhetorical noncombatants the work of fighting the war with adjectives and high-sounding platitudes.

The entire action of the play takes place between 5:30 p.m. Saturday and noon Sunday in the "residents' lounge" of a provincial hotel near an airport in England. The patrons of the hotel are mainly the members of a bombing squadron of the British air force and their wives. Drama occurs every blessed night in such a place, except when the weather is too foul for flying. On clear nights the men take off at 10 o'clock, destination some vital spot in Germany, and return, if possible, at around 5 in the morning. Sometimes Jerry is hovering out of sound and sight above the field and sweeps down at the take-off and takes a toll of ships and men. Sometimes a ship is long "due," and sometimes it doesn't return at all. A man who doesn't return "has bought his." They have a language of their own, the British airmen, a language of understatement which the wives and mothers learn to speak but with a slightly alien accent.

Into the group intrudes an actor (played by Arthur Margetson) famous on the stage and in Hollywood movies for his roles as a great lover. He has finally obtained his divorce and has come to claim the woman he loves (played by beauteous and accomplished Nancy Kelly), who has married a young flight lieutenant in the RAF. She still loves the actor and has written him so. They had lived together for a year, but she has run away from the humiliation of their illicit relationship and had married, in a desperate mood, a fine youth who adores her but toward whom she has only fondness, pity and admiration.

* * *

'22 to 005.'

She is about to confess her past and her love to her husband and go away with the actor, who has pleaded his desperate need of her now that he has grown middle aged and his star is waning. Her confession is delayed by sudden orders for a bombing raid in which her husband is to pilot one of the planes. She has kept up her stage career in London, coming to the airport hotel only when her husband is on leave, and this night she experiences for the first time that excruciating wait from "22 hours" to "005 hours" which other squadron wives have experienced dozens of times—bravely but with no lessening of the anxiety. Her anxiety, however, is different; it is more than half a hope that her husband won't return so she may be saved the ordeal of disillusioning him.

But her pilot does return. She is about ready to tell him what is in her heart when he faints from exhaustion and—as he later confesses to her—from fear. He is the most respected man in the squadron because of his reputation for courage and ability. His bombers and gunners have implicit faith that he will always bring them back. Not only their lives but their morale depend upon an act he puts on; for, as he confesses, he has been secretly horribly afraid in every flight—and the funk at last has got him. Only she, he tells her, can pull him out of it. . . . What is her decision?

Alec Guinness makes his debut in America as the flight lieutenant, and he carried off the highest honors last night. Doris Patston was fine as a barmaid married to a Polish count. Helena Pickard has a part at once comic and pathetic as the laundress who is married to a gunnery sergent. Alexander Ivo provided most of the comic relief. . . . This play is urgently recommended, not as a great play but as a moving, unpretentious one and one to give your heart a glow.

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
December 24, 1942

R. A. F. Deserves Better

By HOWARD BARNES

THAT sedulous importer of English plays, Gilbert Miller, has picked a moderately effective drama of the R. A. F. for his latest presentation. "Flare Path" is in no sense the work that one hopes will be written some day about those few warriors to whom so many of us owe so much, but it has moments of genuine power. Under Margaret Webster's wise direction and with some expert players in the leading roles, the new Henry Miller's offering has a certain fascination and considerable feeling.

* * *

Terence Rattigan, who wrote the show, has leaned heavily on the inevitable appeal of his subject matter to get it past the final curtain. It is far less his craftsmanship than the portentous nature of his theme which makes the play tolerably satisfying. As a matter of fact, he has become bemused with an aging Hollywood leading man, an ex-barmaid and a Polish count to a degree that frequently makes his exposition tawdry rather than illuminating. There is no need of contriving situations where the R. A. F. is concerned. When he contemplates members of that gallant corps he writes well and his play comes across the footlights forcefully.

* * *

The chief difficulty with "Flare Path" is the unconscionable time which it takes to become eloquent and absorbing. For two full acts figures are pushed around the stage of the Henry Miller's like so many puppets. There is the movie star, who is in love with a flight lieutenant's wife. There is the expatriate Pole, who has found a brief tenure of happiness with a trollop while wreaking vengeance on the Huns. A London bus driver turned aerial gunner, a grounded squadron leader and a hotel keeper round out the human contour of the show. It is not until an off-stage bombing expedition occurs, though, that the characters come to life.

* * *

At least it is a good thing that the last act is by far the best in "Flare Path." It is fortunate for the production, too, that knowing performers are on hand to make it so. Arthur Margetson is fine as the screen idol, who tries unavailingly to have his former mistress leave her pilot husband. Alec Guiness is wryly persuasive as the skipper of a Wellington, and Doris Patston contributes a moving and modulated portrayal of the barmaid. Then there is Nancy Kelly, back from Hollywood and assured as the flight lieutenant's wife, and Gerald Savory, lending a touch of humor as the gunner. "Flare Path" is not much of a play, but its subject matter and its presentation give it a vitality which has been badly wanting in recent theatrical exhibits.

"New Faces of 1943"

NEW YORK JOURNAL AMERICAN
December 23, 1942

Leonard Sillman Presents A Number of Youngsters In Another Little Revue

By JOHN ANDERSON

AS a specialist in Freshmen entertainers Leonard Sillman came forward at the Ritz theatre last night with another little revue, listed in the playbill under the somewhat footless title "New Faces of 1943 in New Shoes." Though anatomically peculiar the title is not quite as odd as the show itself, for while Mr. Sillman has again assembled some pleasant enough youngsters, some with talent and personality, some just with their health, most of the material is blighted and faintly mildewed.

The sketches, though often with good ideas and varied in subject matter, are as one in the unanimous absence of real comic invention. There is the mock gravity of a "shirt hospital" (a sleeveless errand if I ever saw one), a small razz of beauty treatments, a burlesque of Saroyan and Wilder in "The Skin of Your Life," an item about the destitute travel bureaus, something about the graduating class in a Bartenders' College, and an Employment Agency satire in which the hard-to-get cook inspects the—Lady of the House.

Thumping Finale

The musical numbers do not seem much more professional. Will Irwin's song "Hey, Gal" has a pleasantly sultry quality, and a sort of title song "Shoes" by the same composer, makes a thumping finale for the first act. Lee Wainer has written both dialogue and music for one of the best pieces in the show, song sketch about a Broadway phone booth agent, with some wry humor in it.

Among the performers there is plainly enough talent to make a bright and informal revue with suitable material. Irwin Corey, as the "melancholy agent in the phone booth sketch, and as a crazy lecturer on Shakespeare, has a definite gift for comedy that has a lump in its throat. Tony Farrar has a smart manner and an incisive gift for satire that should be both caustic and hilarious, yet these qualities are only suggested, never fully displayed, in a congested miscellany of his material. What he does needs sharp editing and emphasis.

The show is almost as weak on the distaff side as it is in the head. Alice Pearce has a distracted goofiness that is at its best in a burlesque English love affair, and the generously dentured Ann Robinson does some eccentric things (identified in the playbill as "Riffing") in the way of song. Hie Thompson dances with polite energy, and now and then Mr. Sillman lends a hand, a foot, or a word in the general clinches, not to say cliches.

But somehow "New Faces of 1943 in New Shoes" seems also fallen arches in masquerade and merely the shoestring of a smile.

"New Faces of 1943"

NEW YORK POST
December 23, 1942

"New Faces of 1943" At the Ritz Theater

By WILELLA WALDORF

LEONARD SILLMAN'S latest revue, "New Faces of 1943," erupted last night at the Ritz Theatre.

Mr. Sillman was all ready to open a huge be-spangled revue with regiments of show girls and elaborate scenic effects when a Government representative turned up talking about priorities and reduced the cast to a dozen or so, cut out all of the show girls but one, and said to go very slow on scenery. Then, after assuring Mr. Sillman that we must have entertainment to keep up morale, he departed, leaving the company to carry on as best it could.

Keeping a stiff upper lip, Mr. Sillman squared his shoulders and proceeded to put on an intimate show in which the principals became the chorus on occasion, and everybody did a little scene shifting now and then, including the one show girl, who was so busy moving furniture that she had almost no chance to lurch across the stage holding one arm in the air in traditional show girl fashion.

Everybody connected with "New Faces of 1943" works hard and unlike so many little shows, it moves along without a hitch. No waiting between scenes. The music, if hardly world-shattering, is pleasant enough, and now and then a laughable sketch comes along. There is some agile dancing and a general air of insouciance that is likeable.

The only trouble with "New Faces" is that it has about it a faintly amateurish, prep-schoolish quality that makes it a little hard to take when stacked up against the slick, ultra-professional Broadway article. We are quite aware that some slick, ultra-professional Broadway revues are terribly dull, and that "New Faces" has its moments, but it would do better, it seems to us, outside the Times Sq. zone where it would be possible to charge less and where the customers don't expect so much.

The Latest "New Faces"

Mr. Sillman has "discovered" quite a number of talented new faces in the past, and maybe there are some coming celebrities in the line-up at the Ritz.

A young dancing pantomimist named Tony Farrar did such unlikely things as pretending he was Fannie Brice impersonating Paul Draper, or imitating a near-sighted toreador who had lost his glasses. Mr. Farrar was often fun, and so was Alice Pearce, who should probably be labeled an eccentric comedienne.

There was very little of what passes for singing, but a dusky warbler named Ann Robinson was the show-stopper of the evening. With flashing eyes and a wide, wide smile remarkably full of white teeth, Miss Robinson indulged in a curious rhythmic exercise described in the program as "riffing." She picked up the show and carried it around with her whenever she came on.

Several of the sketches had good ideas that rather petered out, but a few had good ideas that came to something or were at least worth a few laughs. "Ten Percenters" in which a Broadway agent with his office in a telephone booth went through a typical day's business, was effective, and "Quiet Zone," wherein doctors and nurses in a New York Shirt Hospital performed an operation on an ailing garment, had its moments.

"New Faces of 1943" is a nice enough little show, but it hardly measures up to the Broadway standard, or at any rate what ought to be the Broadway standard.

'NEW FACES OF 1943.'

A revue in two acts, book and lyrics by John Lund; costumes and settings by Edward Gilbert; sketches directed by Lawrence Hurdle; choreography by Charles Weidman and John Wray; presented at the Ritz Theater on December 22, 1942, by Leonard Sillman. In the cast are Mr. Sillman, Irwin Corey, Diane Davis, Dorothy Dennis, Laura Deane Dutton, Doris Dowling, Kent Edwards, Tony Farrar, Ilsa Kevin, Ralph Lewis, Mr. Lund, Marie Lund, Alice Pearce, Ann Robinson, Hie Thompson, Robert Weil and others.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
December 23, 1942

'New Faces of 1943' Brings Fourteen New Talents to Broadway

"New Faces of 1943," revue by John Lund, June Carroll and J. B. Rosenberg. Produced by Leonard Sillman at the Ritz Theatre, New York, Dec. 22, 1943.

★ ★

By BURNS MANTLE

LEONARD SILLMAN is a persistent cuss. He has been bringing new faces to Broadway for the last nine years. And even though none of the revues in which he introduces them has quite equalled the success of the first, he apparently is not at all discouraged.

Leonard's "New Faces of 1943," shown at the Ritz last night, is probably the second best of the series. The faces really are new, so far as this reporter's memory goes, and the talents are pretty definitely in the professional groove.

Many of them hail from night club floor shows. The Messrs. Sullivan and Walker probably know them intimately. We really should get around more.

There are fourteen young people included in this season's crop. Among them the dancers are best. The singers run second and the comics third.

But, as a program note points out, such present-day favorites as Tyrone Power, Henry Fonda, Kay Thompson, Eve Arden, Richard Whorf and Gypsy Rose Lee appeared in early editions of the Sillman shows.

Good Intentions

Who knows? Nine years from now some eager discoverer sitting at this desk may be applauding Irwin Corey or Diane Davis, Dorothy Dennis or Ilsa Kevin, Laura Dutton or Doris Dowling, who were in last night's list.

It is a service to the theatre that Mr. Sillman is doing. New faces and new talents are always in demand hereabout. I think he makes a mistake charging top prices for his exhibits. The price not only limits his audiences, but also the amount of attention his new entertainers attract.

Two dollars as a top figure would work to his show's advantage, and to the advantage of the newcomers.

Last night's favorite, by the record of the applausometer, appeared to be Ann Robinson, a dark-skinned young woman from Harlem. Ann has a teethy smile that is disarming, and such inventiveness that she can give a new twist to old stage tricks.

They All Helped

The best voice was that of Diane Davis; the best dancing was done by Tony Farrar; the most successful of the monologists was Irwin Corey. Mr. Sillman in person contributed a generous amount of pep, in addition to supervising the sequences, which were skillfully shown in an adaptable setting of screens.

Doris Dowling had fun imitating and revealing a showgirl. Ilsa Kevin doubled cleverly in dance and sketch. John Lund, Robert Weil, Laura Dutton and a dozen others each contributed a little something.

It is a two-toned blue revue in coloring and neatly costumed and set by Edward Gilbert. Charles Weidman and John Wray have helped with the dances.

I suspect there were many other unemployed talents in the audience. It was a most friendly and sympathetic crowd.

NEW YORK TIMES
December 23, 1942

Leonard Sillman, Plus a New Set of Faces, Comes Back to Town for the Holidays

By LEWIS NICHOLS

BACK through the years, as the months have turned sedately on the calendar, there always has been Leonard Sillman collecting material for a new revue, raising the money, at irregular intervals putting on a new revue. They have borne such names as "New Faces" and "Fools Rush In," and history notes that some of them have been better than others. This Fall, as the months duly made their appointed rounds, they discovered Leonard Sillman once again up to his old tricks, collecting and raising with the persistence of the builders of the pyramids, or the ants in their hills. And last evening to the Ritz it came—"New Faces of 1943 in New Shoes"—and history this morning must fairly report that it is not one of the ones that is better than the others.

* * *

Mr. Sillman has a theory that Broadway always can use a light revue on the order of "The Garrick Gaieties" or the more recent "Meet the People." In this he is right, of course, but they boasted, in addition to freshness, a comic and brash outlook on the world and on life. The new faces of the current tenant of the Ritz are new faces. It is true, and they are often charming and obviously afford to persons of great good-will, but they are not given the opportunity to sparkle as they should. A mediocre revue requires a great deal more than cheerful enterprise to put it across; mediocre revues, even with old faces that know all the tricks and have been doing them for years, usually come down with a disconcerting thud.

So, last night, did "New Faces of 1943," the Fall brought about primarily by a lack of sketches. The words of Mr. Sillman's new revue are obviously words not far up the academic ladder of Broadway from those of the triangle shows, and in many cases they are not that high. They survey the American scene, but Orson, himself, is far more magnificent than the rather sad tale they tell under the title of "Wells of Loneliness." The legend of a trip through Radio City can be built up to a better climax than they bother to do, and the sketch about hiring a maid—a horrendous matter said to be of some universal consequence at the moment—is not as funny as its implications. There is no sketch that could be lifted out to stand on its own.

The music is a bit better, the number called "Shoes," with a tune by Will Irwin and lyric by June Carroll, being prepared to take up a position anywhere at all. Another called "Love, Are You Raising Your Head," by Miss Carroll and Lee Wainer, is good in the normal torch style of professional Broadway. To sing the saga of shoes —at least to sing part of it—Mr. Sillman, like many another before him, toured the Harlem clubs, and has come up with Ann Robinson, who not forever will be a new face. She has gigantic teeth and a gay breezy style of matching importance, and when she has finished with a number it can well believe it has been through a workout.

As for the others, "New Faces of 1943" also boasts a potential comedian in the person of Irwin Corey, who likewise is from the night clubs. He has a lecture on "Hamlet" that, were it cut a bit, would be hilarious. Laura Deane Dutton is the torch singer of the company, Tony Farrar is the inevitable impersonator, although better than many, and Hie Thompson and Diane Davis are among the dancers. Although it was not so billed in advance, Mr. Sillman was out there in the company as a new face grown a little older in the service of new faces, and it was also he who supervised the production.